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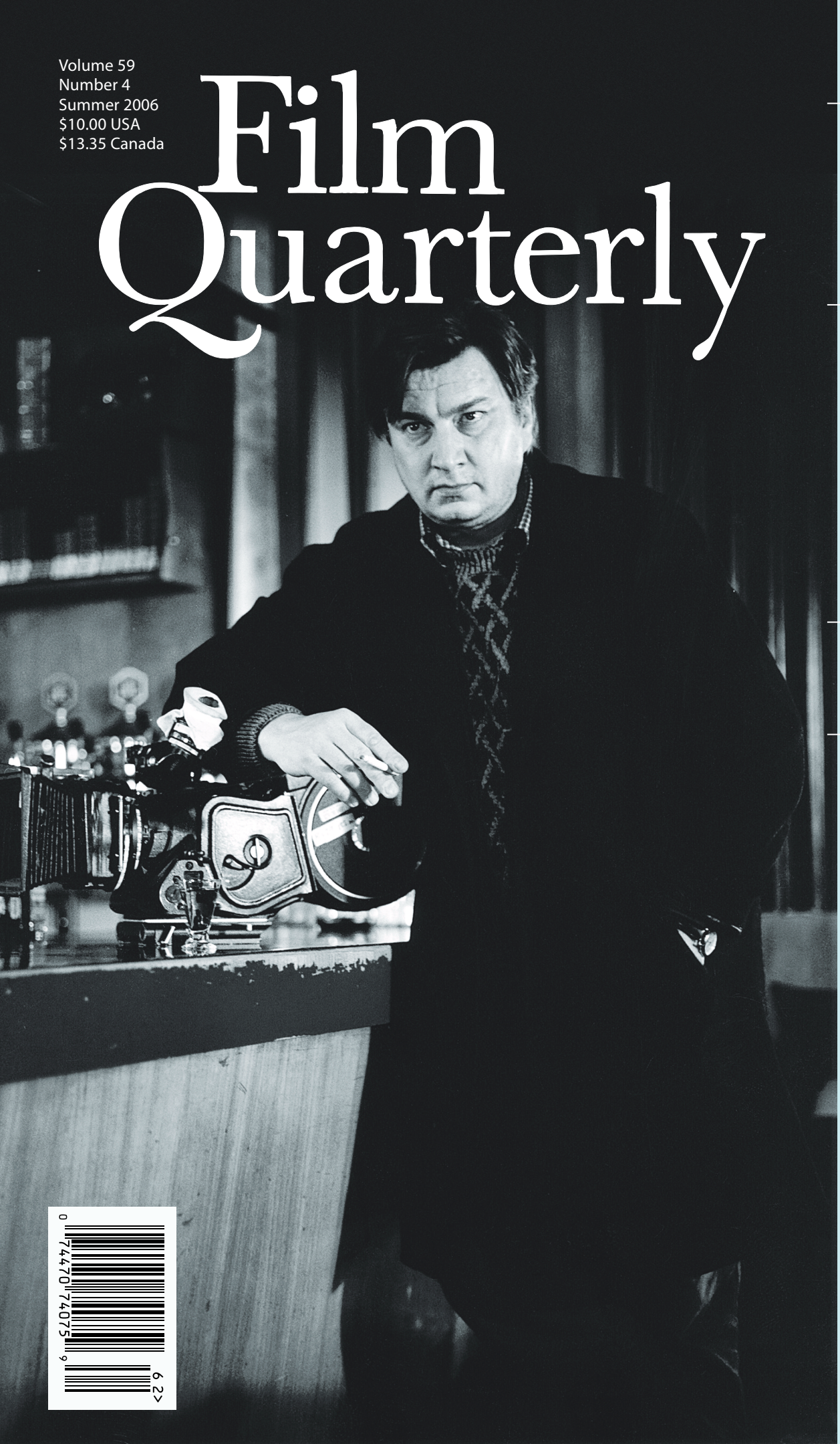

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COVER PHOTO Aki Kaurismäki photographed during the filming of *Dogs Have No Hell* (2001). The camera to his right once belonged to Ingmar Bergman. ©2001 Sputnik OY.

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■ CLOSE UP

Richard Armstrong

Happy Together

IN HIS 2004 BOOK *Revolution!*, Peter Cowie celebrates where and how his generation first savored the cinematic fruits of European modernism—in festival and metropolitan art houses in the 1960s. The thrill was experienced as a shared epiphany in a public space.

I first saw *Chungking Express* on July 17, 1995. I was working at the Cambridge Film Festival—and marching through chapters of my first book, a series of critical readings of films directed by Billy Wilder. For almost five years, my head had been full of classical Hollywood, its illusions so seductive it was easy to begin to believe them. After letting the audience in and tearing their tickets, I sat down on the awful collapsible metal chair on which ushers had to sit, and waited to see that night's screening.

I was unprepared for my feelings and thoughts as *Chungking Express* began. Kinetic, chaotic, lyrical, serious, whimsical, earnest, wry, disciplined, anarchic, and free—this movie baffled, frustrated, appalled, excited, and upset me. I did not know what was going on here. But suddenly the old illusions seemed hackneyed. As Larry Gross wrote in *Sight and Sound* the following year: "When I get done watching one of [Wong Kar-Wai's] movies, I discover that I am giddily and irrationally happy." In the tumult of my response, I was certain of one thing: *Chungking Express* was where the cinema was going in the closing moments of its first century.

Having been immersed in the cause-and-effect logic of classical Hollywood, that night it was as if I had undergone a mind-wash that dissolved encrusted assumptions: not only classicism, but its supposed antidotes—the French New Wave, and other European new waves since. Instead of proceeding, with sobriety and linearity, from opening scene to closing resolution, *Chungking Express* flowed out at each side, swirling around the auditorium like a Chinese dragon. We were both inside and outside the characters and ourselves. Instead of having conventional aims and objectives which the movie methodically charted, these characters—the cop, the lunch-counter girl, the heroin dealer, the air stewardess (cool refugees from Godard, a bemused Western press called them)—seemed astonishingly present. Hollywood classicism and European modernism suddenly seemed stale. Like the people you glimpse on smoky-alley excursions—Reeperbahn, Chinatown, Ginza—here were denizens of our fractured human cornucopia, suitable companions as we lurched towards 9/11, closed borders, terror detentions, and incendiary video feeds. Yet at the same time, their inner exceptionality, that boundless confidence and hope which comes only with youth, abstracted these figures from the lysergic streets and piecework regimes of modern urban lives. Fabulous longings, tragic intuitions, absurd misgivings were stitched together here with Confucian logic. Liberated from Manichean Western rationales of careers, mighty goals, great things, Wong's characters lived for the Day-Glo Yellow Sea inside. Instead of following the screenplay with shot–reverse shot precision, the camera indulged in a welter of angles and flows as the cutting hustled us from frisson to frisson. This wasn't spectatorship, this was narcosis …

From the French Impressionists of the 1920s through Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* to postwar American avant-gardists such as Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger, Western film artists have devised ways to intertwine human desire and film form. Prompted by Freud, the avant-garde found curious and dreadful metaphors for sexual feelings and political iconoclasm. The postwar avant-garde continued to interrogate the Western bourgeois sensibilities which underwrote Hollywood, and which balked at more blissful explorations of sexual interiority. If Hollywood's Method fad and successive new waves labored over the idea that desire could be invoked with franker dialogue, darker looks, the Cassavetes improv made personality itself the new battleground of modernist experiment. While Godard turned the dilemma of men and women into the stuff of Marxist polemic, Wong drew from our crowded postmodern diaspora even more exotic and invisible yearnings. It seems appropriate that Wong's first five films recently became available on DVD. Their emotional and aesthetic plenitude—the mesh of inside and out—seems peculiarly suited to the new era of private epiphany.

You never see love coming. It was late as I walked home that night. Halogen streetlamps smeared before me. If this was 1995, in a few months it would be the centenary of the very first publicly exhibited films, made with a motion camera standing at a man's height and unblinkingly registering the brute reality of the Lumière employees as they were let out into that high bright afternoon and history was made. I wondered what Louis and Auguste Lumière would have made of *Chungking Express*.

Richard Armstrong is a British Film Institute Associate Tutor. His book *Understanding Realism* (BFI Publishing) appeared in 2005.

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■ **Bert Cardullo**

FINNISH CHARACTER

An Interview with Aki Kaurismäki

BORN IN 1957, Aki Kaurismäki has become one of the world's most prolific and most impudent moviemakers. At first, he stood far apart from the Finnish establishment in that his parodies and farces lampooned the conventions of his society. Nonetheless, as he became known and respected on the international film scene, Kaurismäki quickly came to be regarded as the leading talent of his country's miniscule motion-picture industry. Certainly, his success has helped to educate cineastes to the fact that Scandinavian films do not come only from Sweden and Norway.

Kaurismäki began his career in the early 1980s and established himself internationally by 1990 or so. His films are linked in that they are straightforward, seriocomic studies infused with a unique sense of the ridiculous and even the absurd. His characters are removed from the mainstream, in some cases to the point of being isolated and completely alone; occasionally they take to the road, roaming across frozen landscapes in which they remain eternal outsiders. Yet their feelings of alienation or despondency rarely become the principal force at work in the filmic action. Instead, even as Kaurismäki elicits poignancy in the charting of his characters' sad lives, he gives special emphasis to a kind of humor that evokes the simultaneous strangeness and familiarity of their situations.

A number of Kaurismäki's protagonists are dejected blue-collar types driven to desperate acts and outrageous behavior by a repressive society. Such is the case in *Ariel* (1988), a comic–existential road movie about a mineworker who loses his job and sets out on an odyssey across Finland. This picture offers an example of the manner in which Kaurismäki drolly observes the life of a character whose existence is outwardly depressing. Similarly, *The Match Factory Girl* (1990) is a sharply drawn black comedy about a dreary, oppressed young woman. Her job is tiresome, her life monotonous, and then she becomes involved with a man who is destined to drop her. He expects her to squirm back into her shell, but her response—indeed, her revenge—is anything but meek and predictable.

Retaliation or revenge is also a prominent theme in the first film Kaurismäki directed by himself (after co-directing *The Saimma Gesture* [1981] with his brother, Mika), *Crime and Punishment* (1983). A reworking of the Dostoyevsky novel, this picture is set in Helsinki in the 1980s, and the hero, Rahikaainen, murders a powerful businessman who was responsible for the hit-and-run death of Rahikaainen's fiancée. By far, *Crime and Punishment* is Kaurismäki's most somber film; at the other end of the emotional spectrum is *I Hired a Contract Killer* (1990), in which his estranged protagonist is outlandishly depicted. Kaurismäki tells the story here of a nebbish with nothing to live for, yet who haplessly fails to kill himself. He then hires a professional to do the job but changes his mind after unexpectedly falling in love, at which point he must hurriedly attempt to cancel the contract on his life.

Another thematic concern of Kaurismäki's is the creative life. He examines this subject in *The Bohemian Life* (1992), an affectionate comedy about what it means to devote one's life single-mindedly to art, regardless of the consequences and sacrifices. Each of the three main characters in the film—a writer, a painter, and a composer–musician, all men—is aging, has little money, and has never earned critical or commercial recognition. There is no undiscovered Hemingway, Picasso, or Mozart in this group; indeed, it would not be unfair to label its members mediocre talents. Yet all three artists remain steadfastly committed to their work and ideals. The women in their lives remain secondary figures; each man values his library, his piano, or his paint above all else—something that is at once admirable, perverse, sad, and funny.

Leningrad Cowboys Go America (1989), one of Kaurismäki's zaniest movies, features characters with warped senses of their own, even lesser talent. Only here, they revel in their awfulness as they proudly embrace the title "the worst rock 'n' roll band in the world." *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* is a farce that lampoons the extent to which the tackiest aspects of American popular culture have had an impact on even

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Photo: Moune Jamet

the farthest reaches of faraway Finland. Kaurismäki's "cowboys" are a deadpan, perfectly dreadful group of rock musicians from the Finnish (not Russian) tundra, who embark on a "world tour" that will take them, not to Madison Square Garden, but instead through the vast modern wasteland of small-town America—where people will listen to "anything."

Kaurismäki followed with two short films that mined the comic possibilities of the very idea behind *Leningrad Cowboys Go America: Those Were the Days* (1991), a six-minute mini-saga of a lonesome cowpoke rambling through the streets of the Big City in the company of his donkey; and *These Boots* (1993), a five-minute history of Finland between 1950 and 1969 as seen from the viewpoint of the Cowboys. Next Kaurismäki continued with the feature-length *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses* (1994), in which the band actually has a top-ten hit to its credit. In this movie the Cowboys start out in Mexico, make their way to Coney Island, and end up back in Europe; there, their manager professes to be Moses and pledges to guide the boys back to the Promised Land of Siberia. Finally, in the documentary *Total Balalaika Show* (1994), Kaurismäki presents the Leningrad Cowboys in concert before 50,000 fans in Helsinki's Senate Square, with the participation of none other than Russia's Red Army Chorus and Dance Ensemble—a union described by one critic as "the most incongruous, and inspired, cross-cultural pairing since Rudolf Nureyev danced with Miss Piggy."

From the second half of the 1990s to the start of the twenty-first century, Kaurismäki has been less prolific as a director, yet his films remain bittersweet and somehow enchanting—thus consistent in tone with his previous work. *Juha* (1999), for example, is the story of a klutzy farmer and his plain-Jane wife, whose union is thrown out of kilter upon the arrival of an aging, womanizing stranger. Kaurismäki chose to shoot *Juha* (which is based on an early twentieth-century Finnish novel as well as a silent classic of Finnish film) without dialogue and in black and white, which adds to this picture's unique appeal. *Drifting Clouds* (1996), for its part, is the deadpan tale of a hapless husband and wife who somehow manage to stumble into a happy ending that is as unlikely as it is pleasing. Aki Kaurismäki's world view may be summed up in a bit of dialogue

Above: Aki Kaurismäki with an apple, 1991, during the filming of *The Bohemian Life*

from *Drifting Clouds*: "Life is short and miserable. Be as merry as you can," lines that could be applied to his next film as well, *The Man Without a Past* (2002).

The following interview took place on November 15, 2003, in the Restaurant Elite, Helsinki, Finland. Kaurismäki spoke in English for the most part; when he had to use Finnish, it was translated by my wife, who is a native Finn.

Bert Cardullo: Your name "Kaurismäki" has an interesting ring. Is it your real name, and has it been in the family for generations?
Aki Kaurismäki: It is the same name I was born with, yes, but my grandfather changed his name from something Russian. It means "Deer Hill." Nobody in Finland has this last name except my family, and now my wife. She's the one who lately always insists that I write a part for my dog, Tahti, in each of my films. Can we get to the real questions now?

O.K. Is it true that you began as a film critic?
Yes, but I was a bad one. For me it was only masterpieces or shit, and that's not the right way to be a critic. The correct way is to be honest and not pretend anything—the same stuff as it takes to be a good filmmaker.

Why did you start making films?
Because I wanted to. Film schools wouldn't let me in—I was too stubborn. So I learned by watching films from the archives and reading: you can learn a lot about the cinema if you read a lot.

Before I shot anything on my first film, I went with a friend and his camera inside a slaughterhouse—a hall of dead cows. It was completely silent. And my friend explained what sort of lenses we had, the differences between his camera and an ordinary still camera, and so on. Once I understood, I said "fine," but never mention this discussion to anybody! And so then I was able to go out on the set and command: *"camera here! Give me 50 millimeters!"*

For you, filmmaking is pretty much a straightforward affair, isn't it?
Yes, all you need are some actors and a camera. You get them to walk about and talk and the camera to shoot. That's all. The magic comes later, in the editing. This is the part that interests me most, so I almost always do it alone—really alone. I shut myself in a room for days and days. What I especially enjoy is mixing the music; I always have some tunes in my head and then I take a pile of records into the editing room.

I use a Steenbeck editing machine so that I can really handle the material—none of this digital equipment. Nowadays people think that technology solves all the mental or intellectual problems, which it doesn't. Everything has to be based on a human story and technology doesn't help with that.

The Leningrad Cowboys are themselves a story. Were they a singing group before you made your 1989 film about them?
Yes. They had changed their name from the Cold Slippers about a year before *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* was made. They had the hair before I worked with them. When I saw them, I felt they had a problem, but for a long time I couldn't figure out what it was. Finally I realized they needed the shoes—cold slippers!—so they would not appear to be blown away on a windy

Leningrad Cowboys Go America

© 1989 Villealfa Filmproductions

day. They still perform together. Some day, I plan to make an epic about the Leningrad Cowboys meeting Ulysses.

What's your relationship with your regular cinematographer, Timo Salminen?
Timo does the lighting, and I frame the picture. But, again, I do my own editing, I select the music, and I supervise the mix.

What about the use of color as opposed to black and white, as in your 1999 black-and-white film Juha, *a remake of the classic Finnish peasant drama. Your version of* Juha *even eschewed the use of sound!*
I am in love with colors that remind me of Hollywood films of the 50s. But Technicolor has disappeared, so I cannot make the same thing any more. Yet it is true that some movies, such as Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* [1939] and Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* [1956], deeply influenced me in the way that they played with backgrounds. Which is much more difficult to express in black and white. I sometimes carry swatches on the set, you know, comparing colors to obtain a satisfactory color scheme. Some stories call for color, others for black and white—never in between. I am a realist, but you have to be successful in making colors become surreal, or non-realistic. So I guess you could say that I try to use color poetically, that I am more a poet than a social or political commentator—as in *The Man Without a Past,* which is a film about homelessness without being too openly declarative about the problem. After all, you do not make films about ideas, you make films based on stories and the people in them.

You cast the people, or the parts, in your films yourself, don't you?
Of course. I find my actors in bars, where I spend a lot of time myself. Seriously, they're all professionals, but people say I never let them act. Well, many of them are from the theater, where they are taught that the art of acting is shouting. My relationship with my actors has never changed. I hold my finger up when I want them to say the line. They say it, and then I say: "Thank you very much." If they want more detailed direction, in that case there is always the door.

Is there any relationship between your theory of acting and Bertolt Brecht's?
I guess so, in the sense that I believe that "acting" should be avoided in films and that actors should avoid identifying themselves too deeply with any role they play. When I was a student, there was a lot of interest in Brecht's theater, and it's likely that his idea of an epic or dialectical theater, as opposed to a dramatic and illusionist one, influenced me. I like Brecht's idea that the actor should regard himself as a narrator who only *quotes* the character he is playing. In this way, audiences are provoked to draw intellectual conclusions instead of just becoming emotionally attached to what they see.

As Rainer Werner Fassbinder did, you work with a regular troupe of actors. Why?
Go ask John Ford and Howard Hawks why they filmed so often with this moron named John Wayne. You know why? For his walk. Jean-Luc Godard once said how much he hates John Wayne when he's a villain and how much he loves him when he takes Natalie Wood in his arms at the end of *The Searchers* [1956]; be that as it

Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses

© 1994 Sputnik OY

may, the walk always stayed the same. So why bother with new actors when the ones you have can do the job? Why replace a good actor just because you are making a new film?

Do you shoot more than one take?
No. Normally, I shoot the rehearsal and then I pretend to shoot the first take. Nowadays, I can afford to shoot the first take, too, but I always print the rehearsal. I don't use too many takes because, in my opinion, each time the actors are less fresh. That is why I don't even let them read the dialogue before we shoot. You see, I like acting when I see it in other people's films, but for me it isn't suitable. I have another rule, by the way, in addition to the one that forbids shouting: no laughing. And I use a very formal Finnish speech. I tried to do films in street Finnish, but it never worked. As I'm sure you realize from your own experience, people in Finland don't really talk as precisely as they do in my movies.

Which directors reign supreme in your pantheon of influences?
Robert Bresson, for one: I made *The Match Factory Girl* in order to make Bresson seem like a director of epic motion pictures. Godard—he created his own filmic revolution. Then there is Ozu, whom I discovered at age nineteen when I saw *Twilight in Tokyo* [1957]. What moves me in Ozu's work above all else is his humanity, his honesty, his rectitude. In a sense, I am very Japanese in my own work. No ornamentation; the basis for all art is reduction, simplicity. You go from an initial idea or narrative that you progressively reduce until it is sufficiently bare enough to be true. Then, and only then, are you finished.

I know that you are also attracted to the poetic realism of French cinema of the 1930s, particularly the films of Jean Vigo.
Yes, his last picture, *L'Atalante* [1934], is one of the most important movies ever made. I saw *L'Atalante* for the first time in the late 1970s at a film club in Helsinki. It was made by a man who knew he was dying, and for that reason he showed the beauty of life as he was never going to experience it again. I especially admire sequences such as the one in which the young husband, distraught at his wife's desertion, leaps into the river and swims underwater to search for her. That is the sort of cinema which is quite close to painting. I don't know how the hell they did it in the late 1920s, but scenes like those in *L'Atalante* come as close to poetry as anything else in art. I'd sacrifice 300 Hollywood directors in return for Vigo's being able to return to life and make more films like that—and that's an overestimate because they don't have any real directors in California anyway!

Speaking of Hollywood . . .
I'd rather not, but I know you want to hear something on this subject, so I will say a few things. Hollywood is the reason I make the films I do. Because I hate the place. And I would never go there or waste my time watching its current offerings. I may make a bad film, but I refuse to make shit of the kind that Hollywood produces every day. I love the old Hollywood, but the modern one is just a dead rattlesnake that does not even know it's dead. I am like a dog, always barking about Hollywood because with its power, it could make some really good films. Instead, sixty-year-old men are creating boy-scout-level—and boring—violence; crass commercialization is killing the cinema. Why should people go out and pay money to see such bad movies when they can stay at home and see bad television for nothing? I just have no esteem for films in which people are slaughtered with guns (and more) and this is called entertainment.

Look, a film is always drawn on a certain scale. If you start to shoot brutality at random and play with explosives, then nothing will be enough. In the old days, you had one murder and that was enough; now you have to kill 300,000 people just to get the audience's attention. If the film is tuned on a minimalist level, however, even the sound of a cough will be dramatic. In such a picture, if the main character slips and falls into a gutter, the viewer is already worried about what will happen to him, even though in other films people are dropped from airplanes yet survive without a scratch. But not in my films and not in *The Man Without a Past,* which begins with violence but violence that is honest —which is to say, as it really is, fast and ugly. In Helsinki, the violence is not glamorous: it's nameless. If people want to see violence that looks good and is prolonged, they are sick in the head.

In any event, you know my work: I prefer to make a deep impact on one spectator rather than a superficial impact on two million people. In fact, if I ever got a huge audience worldwide for one of my films, I would know I had failed. I am just a medium-class director, in the end, but if I make a number of decent-to-good pictures, together they may add up to something.

A "medium-class" director but not a middle-class one?
No. I have absolutely no interest in making films about the family problems of the middle class. Middle-class life just doesn't interest me. Losers do, because I'm a middle-class loser myself. I spent a few years back in the 1970s, you know, when I too was hungry and homeless.

For a while there, my only company was my sleeping bag. But things were different then: you could be a bum and come in from the cold later, when you finally found a job. Now you just die in the cold.

So your subject matter became the Finnish working class?
Yes. The people who are hidden, the ugly people, as some critics have called them. But then who is good-looking? I think many Hollywood stars are ugly, horribly ugly. And I wouldn't want to see some of the women without their make-up. Totally unable to act, these people, *and* totally ugly. So I will stick with my own ugly people. Of whom there are more and more in Finland, where, if you smoke a cigarette, you don't eat. Or if you drink a bottle of beer, you don't eat *or* smoke a cigarette. We have started to lose an entire generation, which never got work; we have twenty-year-olds over here who are already out of the labor system forever, yet at the same time the government is talking of raising the retirement age to 70.

Let's get back to contemporary cinema. What films do you like, other than your own?
Well, I don't watch too many new films any more. To be very honest, I don't want to waste my time watching fifteen lousy movies just so I can find one that is more or less O.K. The really good films, I've seen them all a hundred times before. Nevertheless, I liked the Dardenne brothers' *Rosetta* [1999], which I would compare with Bresson's *Mouchette* [1966]. I remember Ken Loach's *Riff-Raff* [1991]. And I appreciate the work of my friends Idrissa Ouedraogo, Jim Jarmusch, and Abbas Kiarostami.

Are there any young Finnish directors who interest you?
Not really. There have been great Finnish filmmakers, but never at the same time; I'm particularly fond of Teuvo Tulio and Nyrki Tapiovaara. It is a kind of curse: I have been waiting for a long time for someone to come and surpass me because I am too old and tired, but nobody has arrived. So I have to do the job. The young are too lazy.

What do the young filmmakers, Finnish or otherwise, lack other than industry?
Humility. Above all it is necessary to forget oneself. Start with the beginning, meaning that you are nothing—only dust. Then you watch hundreds of movies, during which you stay absolutely silent. Next you walk alone in the forest while telling yourself that you're nobody. After that, you must concentrate, which means you must watch a hundred more movies. Then you can start to work.

What do you think of Finnish culture in general?
It's the strongest one I ever met. It almost killed me. I also think it's the most beautiful culture in the world. Its problem, though, is the same as that of European culture in general: American culture, which remains the most important one in Europe, on the surface—meaning that it smothers, or tramples, everything that exists at a deeper level.

I know that you boycotted the 2002 New York Film Festival because the United States denied a visa to the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami. Any comment?
I have to make clear that I didn't boycott the New York Film Festival; I like this festival very much. I boycotted

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Somber street life in *Crime and Punishment*

Aki Kaurismäki (middle), in a publicity photo for *The Man Without a Past*

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the United States government. I was at the airport with my ticket in hand when I heard that Abbas wasn't being allowed to enter the United States, and I thought, O.K., if the American government doesn't want an Iranian filmmaker then it won't want a Finnish one, either. And I will not go where I am not wanted.

I laughed out loud when I heard that you had issued a statement in which you denounced American foreign policy and invited defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld to go mushroom-hunting with you in Finland. All the same, given your fondness for rock 'n' roll, old Westerns, and American cars from the 50s and 60s, there has to be some ambivalence in your bemoaning of American imperialism, particularly as it currently exerts itself in the Middle East over the issue (some say) of oil.

Yes, but the America I like is the America of Franklin Roosevelt. Not the one led by that clown George Bush, with the boy scout Tony Blair at his side. Because I think with these maniacs in charge, we don't have a lot of hope. To be honest, I think the clown and the boy scout will bring us to the end of the world. Goodbye.

Let's move to a less explosive subject. The public, or international, fantasy about Finns is that they are a taciturn and lonely people, frozen into numb silence by the arctic chill. Are there a lot of people such as this in Finland—like Iris in The Match Factory Girl, *for example?*

The country is full of them. Deep inside, I'm like that, and so are all my friends. Never accept a drink offered by a Finnish character.

In Ariel *and several of your other films, your characters are allowed to escape, as opposed to meeting their end as Iris does in* The Match Factory Girl. *Why not Iris also?*

I was tired of watching my characters leave while I remained in Finland. So in *The Match Factory Girl,* my central character stayed and I moved afterwards—to Portugal, in southern Europe, where I spend half the year growing grapes, making wine, and then drinking it. This doesn't mean that I don't love Finland. Even if you love your native country, a small holiday from it . . . like a lifetime . . . doesn't do any harm.

Why, if you generally feel as glum as I think you do, do films of yours like The Man Without a Past *have a low-key but insistently optimistic streak?*

Well . . . I believe that the more pessimistic I feel about the situation in the world, the more optimistic my films should be. This is the way I think about it, in any case. Life is too sad to bear and there is no hope for anyone. So, now, let us drink to happy endings. And let's at least die laughing.

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ABSTRACT This is an interview with the Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki, the leading talent in his country's miniscule motion-picture industry. Kaurismäki's films—among them *The Match Factory Girl* and *The Man Without a Past*—are straightforward, seriocomic studies infused with a unique sense of the ridiculous and even the absurd. As an interviewee, their maker himself is just such a seriocomic "study."

■ Stephen Prince

Beholding Blood Sacrifice in *The Passion of the Christ*

How Real Is Movie Violence?

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MOVIE VIOLENCE HAS CHANGED enormously over the decades. The clean and sanitized displays of earlier periods, in which characters could take a bullet at close range with no visible damage inflicted, have given way to the more baroque bloodletting of today's films. But whatever style has been in fashion, viewers need to make sense of it. Is it contrived, exciting, gratuitous? How true is it? The latter query is especially important because viewers must assess the ways in which screen violence fits with their sense of the world. How do they make these assessments about degrees of realism? On what factors do these judgments rest? Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) provides us with a vivid illustration.

I am interested in these questions because they reveal something fundamental about film style and how viewers understand it, which film theory has not fully recognized. I will get to it by considering how many viewers understand the violence in *The Passion of the Christ*. First, however, a premise: the violence in fictional films is always considerably less than real. It is a stylistic construction, a formal design that portrays an event on screen. These formal designs, of course, may be elaborated with varying degrees of ornamentation, occupying a range from the relatively unembellished bullet strikes in Hollywood films of the 1940s to the more flamboyant depictions found in *Three Kings* (1999), *The Matrix* (1999), and films by Sam Peckinpah and John Woo.

In fiction films, violence is an event that is enacted through a structural design, through a deliberate orchestration of camera positions, lighting, editing, and sound. It has always been such. By contrast, in documentary films, real death may be portrayed. This is almost never an option for fiction films, except in special cases where a film such as *Weekend* (1967) may show the killing of animals. But this is almost always fatal to the fictional enterprise because the visual facts of actual death are so compelling, are so physically present, that they assault the viewer's suspension of disbelief. Real death takes a viewer out of the fiction, and it may prove very difficult for that viewer to resume the fictive stance.

When real death is shown on screen, and when the viewer knows it to be real as when viewing a documentary depicting an actual killing, the effect is uniquely

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Jesus (Jim Caviezel) prepares for his scourging in *The Passion of the Christ*

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sobering. It can be powerfully disturbing. Describing a sequence in a documentary in which a submissive dog is attacked and torn apart by its pack, for example, Dirk Eitzen writes:

> Even in a fiction film, seeing an event like this would be profoundly disturbing. Seeing it in a documentary, I found it practically unbearable. I was literally nauseated. I wanted to turn away. And yet, because this was a documentary, I felt an even stronger compulsion to watch. Even more than that, I wanted to intervene. I wanted to pick up a rock and throw it at the dogs that were so viciously attacking one of their own kind.[1]

Eitzen finds that this desire to intervene is one of the key emotional appeals of documentary. Relative to fiction films, it is the difference between "That's a 'real' person crying" and "That's an actor crying," between a judgment that real people are fighting and a judgment that characters played by actors are fighting.[2] By contrast, while fiction films may arouse powerful emotions, they typically do not include this desire to intervene in an unbearable situation. The frame of fiction that surrounds violent action staged for the camera tends to ensure that the viewer remains within the imaginary world of the fiction.

And yet as the history of movie violence has demonstrated, people are often ready to take it as "real." Among viewers who saw *The Wild Bunch* at a sneak preview in 1969 and filled out response cards, many praised the film for its "realism." One wrote that it was the "most realistic motion picture yet conceived."[3] Despite the evident fact that they are staged for the camera, violent scenes in fiction films are quite capable of evoking feelings of horror and extreme distress in viewers. The rape scene in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) or the killing and mutilations of Vietnamese villagers in *Platoon* (1986) exemplify the power of fictional violence.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* gives us a striking demonstration of the perceived realism of fictive violence. Among those most hostile to the film, it was seen as a kind of violent pornography or an exercise in anti-Semitism. But among viewers who supported the film, particularly Christians receptive to this very graphic modern rendition of a passion play, the judgment was that Gibson had gotten it right, that the film was truthful and was the most accurate and realistic film depiction of the physical torments inflicted on Jesus after his arrest. The responses of these viewers exemplify in especially clear terms the processes by which spectators assess stylized and enacted violence as being "real." I will, therefore, privilege this group of viewers in the following discussion. Rather than describing the range of opinion on the film, I want to examine the responses of this group of viewers in relation to the facts of the film's stylized rendition of violence, and the empirical data on the ways that viewers attribute degrees of realism to fictional depictions. The responses of these Christian viewers are especially emphatic manifestations of emotional and cognitive reactions that are, in fact, common to moviegoers in general.

As a passion play, Gibson's film is designed to evoke the blood-cult origins of Christianity, to provide an en-

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A vision of transcendence based on extreme suffering

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A more oblique visual approach in *Ben-Hur* (1959)

actment of the sacrifice at the core of the religion. Describing the place of ritualized violence within religions throughout the world, Maurice Bloch notes that these rituals invariably involve an effort to leave the everyday world behind. "This leave-taking . . . is visualized in the most obvious way possible, by a symbolic death, since what is being negated is the transience of human life, and to go beyond life one must pass through death. This is death brought about by the ritual and therefore a kind of killing."[4] Moreover, it is a killing "that requires for its dramatic purposes *a great show of leaving vitality behind* [italics added] in order to be with transcendental beings." The need for a great show of leaving vitality behind, of surmounting fleshly existence, provides the psychological and religious imperative for the film's extraordinary violence. The greater the suffering and violation of the flesh, the more decisively is a vision of transcendence achieved. The Christian viewers who were most in tune with the film understood that its extreme violence was a necessary prerequisite to transcendence. Therefore, the more violent the film could be, the deeper and truer an evocation of the ritual sacrifice it would offer. Thus, its violence, provided that it was graphic and not oblique and indirect, provided the most direct route to realism, that is, to the truth of the ritual that was being enacted through violence. The film's graphic violence offered testimony to the faith of Mel Gibson as filmmaker and to the reality of the spiritual domain toward which the film points.

Grasping these relationships, Christian reviewers of the film wrote that "Gibson is giving us a look at what that blood sacrifice *actually was* [italics added]."[5] Another wrote that the film "faithfully depicts" the horrors inflicted upon Jesus, adding: "This is the first time I've seen a story of the Truth told truthfully."[6] Yet another wrote: "Because it looks so real, the scene where Jesus is whipped with a cruel 'cat-o-nine-tails' designed to grab the skin and rip out great chunks of flesh becomes almost unbearable. In fact, I could never reassure myself that any of the results of Jesus' torture 'looked fake.'"[7]

For many of these reviewers, the physical and spiritual realities incarnated in the film's violence necessitated a shift from their usual condemnation of graphic film violence to its praise. Their judgment that the film's violence is truthful and realistic led some of the reviewers, who typically oppose graphic movie violence, to applaud it in Gibson's film. "Although many will recoil from its graphic nature, the horror Gibson shows us is necessary for a true understanding of the sacrifice and the terrible cost that was paid when God sent his only Son to die," wrote a reviewer for *Crosswalk*.[8] Another wrote: "According to Preview's standards, the violence would earn this film a negative acceptability rating, but if there was ever a place where violence is appropriate, or acceptable, this is it."[9] And James Dobson offered this praise: "In any other context, I could not in good conscience recommend a movie containing this degree of violent content. However, in this case, the violence is intended not to titillate or entertain, but to emphasize the reality of the unspeakable suffering that our Savior endured on our behalf."[10]

As I noted, one basis among Christian viewers for perceptions of the film's realism was ontological. Visualized in such detail, Christ's suffering opens the gates toward the sacred. However, another and more mundane consideration motivated their evaluations, and this was a matter of the film's cinematic context. The viewers measured Gibson's movie against other Hollywood

depictions of Jesus' torture and crucifixion. The film's graphic violence was judged to be "realistic" in comparison with the pre-existing cinematic tradition of sanitized and oblique depictions of crucifixion. In such earlier films as *The Robe* (1953), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), the camera discretely averts its gaze from Christ on the cross, and none of the whipping and beating that followed his arrest is depicted. By comparison, Gibson's film was judged as truer. The reviewer for *Christian Answers* acknowledged that:

> classic-style Passion films probably wouldn't have the same effect on today's audiences that they did on those of 50 years ago, because techniques of extreme graphic violence have been used in films of all types, from war movies with a message of self-sacrifice to ridiculous horror and horror-comedy flicks. Moviegoing audiences are desensitized, are bored by the old-style "less is more" approach, and demand "realism."[11]

Because of its contrast to sanitized depictions of the Passion—which had been the norm in Hollywood cinema—Gibson's graphic violence equates with "realism." Moreover, this reviewer acknowledges that graphic violence has become a kind of lingua franca in contemporary cinema, a key means for reaching modern audiences, and that, from this standpoint, Gibson was under a certain compulsion to employ it as a means of reaching, of affecting, modern viewers.

Gibson's film, then, is judged to be realistic for reasons of religious ontology and comparative cinematic context. Interestingly, however, these perceptions leap across the manner in which the film gives us a violence that is stylized in manifestly cinematic, shrewd, and calculated ways. I want to examine the film's style in some detail before asking why the presence of style seemed to count for so little in the reactions of viewers, why they were so ready to pass over style in order to locate truth and realism at the level of content.

Based on the reviews that I sampled and quoted, one would not know that *The Passion of the Christ* is a digital effects-intensive film. But, in fact, many elements in the picture's depiction of violence have been achieved through digital means. Gibson, however, has not advertised this fact in the manner that *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) or *The Matrix* or *Spider-Man* (2002) are marketed as special effects-intensive films. The digital wizardry in *The Passion of the Christ* is like a family secret that stays closeted; the film's marketing stressed the rhetoric of faith and truth rather than cinematic artifice. The emphasis even extends to the DVD edition of the film, which is conspicuously lacking in the kind of behind-the-scenes, how-they-did-it featurettes that are commonly found on the DVDs of other special effects-intensive pictures. Anecdotally, I can report that a Catholic colleague of mine actually denied, and found it very hard to believe, that much of the film's violence was achieved digitally. If the film's digital origins run counter to its rhetoric of faith and realism, why then do viewers leap so readily across its stylized violence to embrace a view that it is true?

An immediate but only partly satisfying answer is that they do not notice the effects as effects. Thus, in praising the film as being truthful, accurate, and realistic, reviewers are also implicitly praising these qualities within the film's digital imagery. Digital imagery is most famous for its overtly unreal creations like the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1993). Digital imagery is used in fantasy contexts to show off imaginary creatures and to create effects that could not be photographed, like the thousands of Orcs in the *Lord of the Rings* films. At the same time, however, in contemporary film, digital imaging techniques are exploited in more subtle ways, below the viewer's radar, at a level not generally noticed by audiences. These techniques include the process of digital grading, used in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *Lord of the Rings,* and other films to alter color, contrast, light, and many other image attributes in post-production.[12] This is a subliminal level of image manipulation; audiences typically do not notice these alterations. Viewers do notice digital creatures like Gollum but not a digital lighting effect used on a flesh-and-blood actor. Given the often subliminal presence of digital effects in modern cinema, it was inevitable that eventually they would confuse judgments about accuracy and realism. So, among its other significant attributes, *The Passion of the Christ* gives us perhaps the first really striking demonstration of digital wizardry used to create images that viewers deem truthful and authentic rather than evidently fantastic.

In the following discussion of the film's presentation of violence, and of its digital effects, I want to clarify how the violence was achieved in cinematic terms, and to contrast what clearly emerge as artistic decisions by Gibson and his team of filmmakers with what we know about the history and physiology of scourging and crucifixion. Some striking disparities prevail between what the film visualizes and what the historical record tells us of these practices. In the discussion that follows, I am assuming that fidelity to the historical record constitutes one basis for realism in a historical drama like *The Passion of the Christ.* Delib-

erately diverging from this record takes us toward the stylistic domain, toward the artifice of cinematic fiction, and away from realism, at least in terms of its historical constituent. While this divergence does not threaten the degree of realism perceived in the picture's violence by the "naïve" viewer, it does demonstrate a number of ways that the film's violence is closer to "movie violence" than to the actuality of the events depicted. After examining the film's digital violence, I return to the questions that opened the essay and examine the ways that the comments from Christian reviewers I have sampled are part of an old and enduring tradition of viewer response to movie violence, and, even more generally, to movies themselves.

The Passion of the Christ featured 135 digital effects shots,[13] but the actual number of special effects shots climbs even higher if one considers traditional approaches as well. Altogether, the effects in the film represent the full spectrum of film wizardry, including matte paintings, greenscreen work, wire removal, miniature models, and animatronics. In the opening shot, for example, the camera pans down from a sky which is a digital matte painting. Some of the extreme long shots of Christ on the cross utilize an animatronic model. Since the film's violence is my focus, I would like to concentrate on two now-famous sequences—the lengthy sequence of Jesus' scourging, and the briefer scene of a nail being driven into his hand on the cross.

One way of measuring the realism of these scenes is to compare them with what we know about these methods of Roman torture. If the depicted violence faithfully reproduces the known facts of this ritual practice, then we can say that the film honors the historical constituent of its violence. If not, then we begin to enter a world more imaginary than historical, one where the emphasis falls on the first term of the descriptor "movie violence." The scourging scene is one of the longest and most intensively violent in the film. Along with allied scenes of Jesus being beaten and then suffering on the cross, the scourging scene gives the film an ideal structure for dramatizing violence that the viewer is encouraged to find deviant and grossly objectionable. Sociologist Karen Cerulo has analyzed the narrative structures that prompt viewers to respond to and evaluate violence in given ways, depending on how narrative events are sequenced. One of these structures she calls "the victim sequence." Such a sequence enables filmmakers to establish "an early link between victims of violence and the heinous nature of the acts that befall them."[14] In a victim sequence: "The victim provides the porthole through which [viewers] enter the story. In this way, victim formats . . . prioritize the dark side of violence. Violent actors along with their motives and circumstances are met from the vantage point of the offended."[15] The structure promotes an alliance with the offended, and emphasizes the gross and unacceptable nature of the violence. This is clearly how the design of the scourging scene is meant to operate, guiding the viewer toward a moral judgment that the violence is objectionable.

The scene shows an extreme violation of Jesus' body and concentrates on the intensity of his suffering. It shows a Roman guard using the type of weapon that in all probability was used on Jesus, a flagrum, a short whip with iron balls and sheep bones tied to the ends of its thongs. Flogging with this weapon was the preliminary to every Roman execution, unless the victim was

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The scourging scene emphasizes the suffering of the victim

female. A flagrum would typically do a great deal of damage, ripping through the skin, laying bare the skeletal muscles and then shredding these as well. This would produce a great deal of blood loss, even bringing on circulatory shock.[16] The objective was to whip the victim to a state just short of death. Sometimes victims died during the scourging, so a degree of skill was involved in bringing the victim as close to this point as possible. The amount of blood lost during scourging typically helped determine how long the victim survived on the cross.

While Gibson shows the right weapon, however, and a very long scene of flesh-gouging flaying, he has in other respects moved the scene away from a historically oriented physical realism. There is, for example, very little evident blood loss in the scene, whereas in reality this type of flaying produced copious bleeding. In the film, the flagrum opens gaping wounds, but these don't extrude much blood, despite the exposure of muscle and bone. Most of the blood visible in the scene appears at its end, in a high-angle shot that shows a rather tasteful spatter around the whipping post, a spatter that looks a bit like a Jackson Pollock painting. It is not immediately clear why there is so little blood in the scene. Perhaps it was a matter of special effects economics—liquids remain rather difficult to do convincingly in the digital realm. Perhaps Gibson simply felt that too much blood would be distasteful for the audience, but if we are judging the scene for its historical realism, there should be much more.

Additionally, Jesus should be naked. The Romans stripped their victims before scourging, and typically whipped their back as well as their buttocks. If the victim collapsed as the movie character does, the flagrum might also shred the genitalia. Obviously, depicting a naked Jesus with genitalia exposed and even wounded constitutes a taboo, and thus Gibson gives us a clothed Christ. But in other respects, too, what Gibson shows fits in with the long tradition of movie whippings, where the victim has his back exposed but otherwise remains clothed. And the movie Jesus takes the pain with the same kind of stoicism that Mel Gibson and other celluloid heroes have exhibited in the torture scenes in their movies. He does not wail and scream in agony. He grimaces and holds it back, as movie heroes have always done. Crying is considered unmanly; movie heroes never do it, no matter what pain they are in, and neither does Gibson's Jesus. On these measures, then, the scene has been inflected in a direction that is more ideological and tasteful than it is authentic. As horrific as the scene is, these compromises mute the degree of brutality that would otherwise be present—and that should be present from the standpoint of historical realism.

Key elements of the scene's violence are digitally created.[17] The flagrum itself is a digital effect; it had no existence as a prop wielded by the actor during the process of scourging. The actor playing the guard pantomimed the whipping, and the whip itself was added as a greenscreened element and tracked onto his movements. The wounds that open on Jesus' back were also digital effects and were accomplished in a variety of ways. In the early stages of the whipping, the actor Jim Caviezel was made up with the wounds attached as prosthetics to his back. These were then covered with digital skin elements that were removed via computer when the whip struck, to simulate the sudden opening

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In one of the film's most unrealistic details, Jesus' scourging causes little bleeding

of a wound. But this description is a little misleading. The whip, of course, never actually struck anything, and it never co-existed with the actors in any three-dimensional space. The whip and the wound reveals were composited additions to the scene as it had been photographed. Moreover, the sprays of blood and skin caused by the whipping were digital elements. These were greenscreened and then added into the shot during post-production. In the later stages of the scourging, when there were more wounds than unbroken skin on the character's back, the process was reversed. Caviezel was shot without wound prosthetics, and these were then tracked digitally onto him.

An example of this technique is found in the most gruesome moment in the scene, when the flagrum's teeth wrap around Jesus' side and rip out a large chunk of flesh. Caviezel was filmed clean, without the corresponding wound prosthetic on his body, and he pantomimed Jesus' reaction. A body double was outfitted with the wound prosthetic (with the flagrum's teeth embedded in it), and was then filmed as the teeth were ripped out. This element was then digitally tracked onto Caviezel's body with some digital painting used to hide the seams of the composite.

Where does "realism" enter into this assembly? The scourging is presented as a series of composited shots, made from numerous elements that were photographed separately. Some of these—the digital painting used to blend skin tones and hide the edges of composited elements—were not photographed at all. Thus, one measure of realism—the spatial reality of the photographed scene, that is, cinematic realism in a Bazinian sense—is lacking. Of course, this measure of realism is always lacking in special-effects shots, but in this case viewers do not relate to the scene as a special-effects scene. Why do viewers favorably disposed to the film find these effects, and others like them, to be credible and "realistic," to the point that many are audibly moved to tears while watching the sequence? They have no real-world frame of reference to measure the violence by—no one has seen the kind of scourging depicted here, and few are knowledgeable about its historical details. The crux of the matter is that the wounding appears credible, especially in the absence of these other frames of reference, provided viewers suspend their disbelief. To scrutinize this sequence for evidence of digital manipulation would involve an acknowledgment of the filmmakers' stylizations—and thus of the artificiality of the scene.

A key constituent of the shot's design is its brevity. The moment where the scourge rips out the chunk of flesh is very quick. It is just a flash of an image really, and this brevity serves to hide the digital manipulations that are at work. It does not allow viewers to study the blend of elements in the composited image. It is followed by a burst of music and by reaction shots (horrified onlookers, a laughing guard) that are meant to emphasize and underline the viewer's emotional response. Furthermore, the framing of the shot is conspicuous and ostentatious. Gibson cuts to a low camera angle just before the mutilation occurs, and a viewer attentive to stylistic design knows that something dramatic is about to occur. The low camera angle brings us in close to Jesus, and the composition centers on his side, the better to concentrate our attention on the spot that will be mutilated. The composition is meant to

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The wound reveals are digital effects

serve the effect, to display it, to flaunt it. This is a very calculated stylistic design—the camera set-up emphasizes the effect while the editing prevents it from being exposed as an effect—and it takes us some distance from notions of cinematic realism, at least to the extent that such notions imply that a filmmaker is only minimally involved in mediating on-screen action.

So the basis for an attribution of realism must lie elsewhere, and before I suggest where that may be, I want to look at some details of the crucifixion scene and mention another of the film's high-profile effects shots. As with the scourging, Gibson glosses over some of the more unpleasant aspects of death by crucifixion. Death for these victims typically occurred from a combination of numerous factors, including hypovolemic shock as an aftereffect of scourging, cardiac rupture, and suffocation due to stress on the respiratory system. Hanging on a cross, with all of the body's weight pulling down on the arms and shoulders, kept the victim's chest muscles and lungs in a state of sustained inhalation. This made it very difficult to breathe or speak. To breathe out, the victim had to push upward with feet, wrists, and elbows. When this became impossible, asphyxiation would occur. Pushing upward, however, caused excruciating pain.

The crucifixion victims in the film show little difficulty in breathing or speaking, and in this respect the film is quite consistent with other Hollywood pictures that hang them on the cross but do not deprive them of dialogue. According to scripture, Jesus did speak from the cross seven times. For the sake of accuracy, the film should show that the effort at speech itself involved tremendous physical struggle and torment—it would require that the victim maneuver himself into a position where exhalation could occur. Moreover, while victims languished on the cross, insects would feed on their eyes, on their open wounds, and would burrow into their noses, mouths, and ears. Gibson omits such details, and while *The Passion of the Christ* does feature birds of prey tearing at the flesh of victims, the film shows this as a kind of horror movie effect—a carrion bird suddenly plucks the eye out of one of the thieves. What we do not see is any sustained assault by insects and other predators.

Like the gouging of Jesus' side during the scourging, the moment where his hand is nailed to the cross is one of the film's high-intensity scenes of violence. It, too, is a digital composite, made from a live-action element of Caviezel with his arm on the cross and his hand tucked underneath through a slot, and green-screened elements of a spurting blood tube, a nail pounded into the end of the cross, and a prosthetic palm with wiggling fingers supplied by a body double.

As numerous commentators have pointed out, the nailing of the hand is not physically possible. Because the palm of the hand cannot support the weight of the body, the Romans nailed their victims in the wrist, just above the carpals, in a location that probably severed the median nerve, causing excruciating pain throughout the arm and shoulder. This is why the maneuvering necessary for breathing caused such pain—it aggravated the crushed or severed median nerve. Nailing the wrist in this way did not sever the radial or ulnar arteries, which run along either side of the wrist. While scourging, therefore, caused major blood loss, crucifixion did not, because the impalements did not sever major arteries in

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This low-angle framing signals the digital effect

either the wrists or the feet. Thus, the spectacular blood spurt in the film that greets the nail through the palm is purely a matter of cinema and its stylistics of violence rather than an issue of realism, understood in terms of the historical and physiological practice of crucifixion. In modern cinema, dramatic woundings typically involve impressive arterial spurts, and Gibson's staging of the scene places the action clearly within this context. It owes more to cinema than to history.

Why the palm and not the wrist? Although inaccurate, some commentators have suggested that Gibson did this "to preserve familiarity with the story as most people visualize it."[18] But this explanation seems relatively unconvincing, especially in a film that went to such lengths to recreate an ancient world as to have the actors speak in a tongue requiring subtitles. An alternative explanation is that Gibson perhaps deemed a nail through the palm to be more excruciating for the film viewer to watch than one through the wrist. An assault to a man's hand seems more personal and psychologically punishing than an assault to the wrist, and the film viewer would intuitively make this distinction. So it seems likely that nailing the palm enabled Gibson to ramp up the scene's violence in a manner that he desired, and that the dramatic blood spurt visibly emphasizes.

A close look at Gibson's account of the crucifixion has shown what the scourging scene also revealed, namely, that *The Passion of the Christ* stylizes its violence in ways that are very contemporary and are consistent with modern cinema traditions of screen violence. In doing so, the film fails to honor the standards of historical realism that it has made one of the key elements of its identity. While the cinematography of the film emulates the look of old masters like Raphael, Caravaggio, and Géricault,[19] the staging of the action, with its blood spurts, prosthetic wounds, and slow-motion inserts, places the violence in a cinematic vernacular that is immediately familiar and accessible to modern viewers.

In this sense, there is more of cinema style than of "realism" to the film. However, because the style is familiar, it may help to foster a viewer's sense that Gibson has achieved a higher degree of realism than have other films depicting these events. Because the style is so contemporary, it may seem inherently truer for viewers. And yet for this very reason it is important to be careful not to conflate aspects of cinematic style with notions of realism. Stylistic designs that were hailed for their realism at one point in time may later come to seem excessively ornate and mannered. The slow motion and montage editing in the work of Sam Peckinpah give us a striking example of this, and it may well be that the digital effects and bloody flourishes of *The Passion of the Christ* will become more transparent as technique a decade from now.

I have been giving close and detailed attention to the film's stylistic rendition of violence in order to question its degree of "realism," and I have been suggesting that, in some key respects, there is more of cinema style here than of historically based authenticity. But an important question remains unanswered—do viewers care? To put this another way, do viewers notice these attributes of stylistic design as *design* or do they pay more attention to content? How much does cinema style count relative to behavior depicted on screen?

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The nailing of Jesus' palms was a digitally composited effect

If we adopt a historical perspective on these questions, we find that they are enduring ones, and share thematic constancy with audience reactions to movie violence since the inception of the medium. As I have discussed in *Classical Film Violence,* the decades-long censorship and regulation of movie violence, which officially began with a Chicago ordinance in 1907, was highly focused on issues of behavior and reference rather than those of cinematic style. In the years before Hollywood's Production Code, municipal and state censors targeted specific behaviors on screen that they deemed to be objectionable. These included gangsters or outlaws pointing guns at the camera, killings or assaults performed with knives or arrows, crimes of violence directed at police or law enforcement officials, and depictions of a victim's pain and suffering. It did not matter whether these were presented in close-up or long shot, with high-key or low-key lighting, as a montage or not.

When Hollywood passed its Production Code in 1930, the emphasis on behavior was written into the Code, and the kinds of material that local censors had been deleting were also written into the Code as specific content areas that filmmakers were warned to stay away from. From 1930 until the last vestiges of the Code were swept away in 1968, the Production Code Administration (PCA), which enforced the Code, was always far more attentive to content than to issues of cinematic style. Because it vetted scripts, the PCA was never in a good position to evaluate and respond to the manner in which a filmmaker had stylized scenes of violence. The PCA came into play during pre-production, not production itself, but, even so, its key concern lay with violent acts, not their stylistic rendition.

In *Classical Film Violence*, I define movie violence as the stylistic encoding of a behavioral act. One can, therefore, examine the behavior or its stylistic depiction. The PCA concentrated its regulatory efforts on behavior—how gangsters and police were depicted on screen, for example—rather than on issues of camerawork, lighting, or editing. It considered the referential aspects of cinema to be of paramount importance, the way that screen characters might act as role models for the audience. The PCA aimed to shift this role modeling in as positive a direction as it could. Meanwhile, as it focused on issues of content, filmmakers were learning how to stylistically elaborate scenes of violence, how to use cinema style to make movie violence more visceral, kinetic, and emotionally powerful.

The biggest change that occured in screen violence after 1968 was an increase in its stylistic amplitude, that is, filmmakers continued to depict the same kinds of violent acts as before but now gave them more stylistically elaborate treatment. By detailing wounds to the body, and using camerawork and editing to extend the screen time of violent episodes, film violence has become more insistent and expansive, and this change has occurred predominantly in the domain of style rather than behavior. This is one reason that stylistic considerations are so important when examining the subject of film violence.

The Passion of the Christ exemplifies this increase in stylistic amplitude. Many films have depicted beatings, whippings, and crucifixions, but none has given these acts the kind of cinematic detailing that Gibson's film provides. So, on the one hand, it exemplifies the stylistic trend of movie violence since the fall of the

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Like earlier Hollywood movies, Gibson's shows Jesus conversing while on the cross

Production Code. On the other hand, however, considerations of behavior and reference have arguably remained uppermost in the minds of many viewers responding to the film's violence, much as these issues did for the PCA in earlier decades of cinema. Viewers who perceive the film's violence—and the digital wizardry that makes it possible—as being "realistic" are, like the PCA, concentrating on issues of behavior. For them, this is not an actor portraying a character. This *is* the body of Jesus Christ on screen; this *is* how it was. Christian reviewers of the film have written: "His body was beaten, kicked, struck and spat upon, then nailed to a cross to die. *The Passion of the Christ* faithfully depicts these horrors inflicted upon our Lord."[20] Another reflected: "Speaking personally, I was deeply affected by a single thought while watching the movie: I did this to Jesus."[21]

Herein lies an interesting paradox in viewers' reception of cinema. While filmmakers think deeply and carefully about how they orchestrate picture and sound, viewers tend to attribute the details of stylistic design to content areas, assimilating them into their pre-existing schemas of character and situation. In a sense, the act of viewing cinema entails the transformation of style into content. A persuasive amount of empirical evidence suggests that viewers do not remember elements of style after seeing a film and that they will frequently attribute aspects of design to elements of content. In an experiment where viewers were asked to recall what the actors were doing in a series of film clips and how much and what type of editing was used in the clips, Robert Kraft found that viewers remembered the behaviors quite well but had difficulty recalling details of the editing. He wrote: "One general finding which is important to emphasize is that subjects' memory for easily perceived structural features of film is terribly inaccurate. . . . Cinematic structure can appreciably influence viewers' evaluation of film stories, yet the structural features themselves are not well remembered."[22] Studies of other structural features, such as camera angle, demonstrated similar findings.[23]

Summarizing the empirical research on this issue, Paul Messaris concludes: "Whereas the ability to recognize the objects in an image, to make sense of a movie's space and time transitions, and to grasp the point of nonnarrative editing . . . is something the typical viewer appears to acquire quite readily, the viewing skills required for the perception of intentionality appear to rest on exceptional experience or on explicit training."[24] He points out that one of the barriers to the perception of style or artifice is the "authentic look of the world portrayed in these movies—even when that authenticity is more a matter of convention than of actual fidelity to real-life prototypes."[25]

Characters and their behavior have a tremendous immediacy in film; camera position, editing, and other aspects of stylistic design do not. Viewers perceive characters and behavior; they *see* them on screen. They do not see style in the same way, do not perceive elements of design or intention unless they have been trained to do so or unless the design is extremely ostentatious—like "bullet time" in *The Matrix* or the sudden switch to anime in *Kill Bill* (2003). Although the objects and events in the world—or the characters and their surroundings in a film—are constituted in and through our perception systems, they seem to exist naturally before us. Writing in another context, Lieberman et al. note:

> Because we have the sense of having generated our thoughts but not our perceptions, we tend to trust the latter in a way we do not trust the former. The products of perception have a "given" quality that leads us to feel we are in direct contact with reality. Thoughts are about things, but perceptions *are* things, which is why we say, "I am thinking about Katie" when Katie is absent, but not "I am having a perception about Katie" when Katie is standing before us. Our perceptions feel immediate and unmediated, our thoughts do not . . .[26]

Characters in film, their behavior, and their physical surroundings are things in this fashion, immediately perceivable, unambiguously present. The same is not true about film structure.

Throughout the history and regulation of screen violence and the operation of the PCA, behavior remained the founding category of perception, but we can now see that this is an axiom of film viewing in general. It helps to explain why many viewers take the violence in *The Passion of the Christ* as being realistic, despite its historical infidelities and its congruence with cinema conventions. For these viewers, its realism is a function of what is most immediate and given to their perceptions. Because they seem to see flesh ripped and gouged, because the film's violence is horrifically detailed, it must therefore be a truer depiction of what Jesus endured than earlier films have offered. As a result, the film's cinematic stylization is not seen as such but is subsumed under a category of behavioral referents that are deemed to be true.

Viewers' judgments about "realistic" violence, then, depend on the style's congruence with the referential frameworks that people hold about the violent event

that is being depicted. But these then overrule style and take precedence as what the viewer sees. Interestingly, however, these frameworks are not necessarily veridical because most viewers do not have first-hand experience of the kinds of violence that movies typically portray. How many of us have actually seen a crucifixion? Thus, to some extent, the viewers' mental frameworks themselves derive from cinema, and I have noted some of the ways that Gibson plays to this in the film. The paradox of film viewing lies in the reorganization of the cinematically conventional and contingent by the attributional frames of reference viewers bring to the film. Film theory has acknowledged this paradox but has tended to misplace the emphasis. Film theory of the 1970s was deeply suspicious of cinema, of its tendency to induce an impression of reality in viewers, but this tendency was framed as an act of deception, as the medium's originating sin. It is not that the medium "fools" viewers; it is that viewers seize control of the filmmaking designs. They reconstitute the sights and sounds that the medium has provided into a set of nominal categories, understood as people, places, things, and events.

The enduring nature of this reconstitution of the medium, its persistence across decades, suggests that the domain of cinematic style remains a latent one for viewers—but latent in a very Freudian way, exerting a determinative influence on their experience while going relatively unrecognized as a key constituent of response. In this respect, it was intelligent of Gibson to release the film on DVD without making-of featurettes. By suppressing coverage of visual effects on the DVD, Gibson has ensured that viewers sympathetic to the movie will have a seamless experience of perceived cinematic realism, unencumbered by undue attention to the artifice of style. In doing so, he gleaned the paradox at cinema's heart, the manner in which behavior trumps style.

NOTES

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ABSTRACT Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* includes many digital special effects and significant departures from the physical facts of scourging and crucifixion. Yet viewers frequently described the film as "realistic." The essay explores this paradox in terms of the relative weight of importance viewers ascribe to film style as opposed to content.

■ Kristen Whissel

Tales of Upward Mobility

The New Verticality and Digital Special Effects

> So neither the horizontal nor the vertical proportion of the screen *alone* is ideal for it.
>
> *In actual fact, as we saw, in the forms of nature as in the forms of industry, and in the mutual encounter between these forms, we find the struggle, the conflict between both tendencies. And the screen, as a faithful mirror, not only of conflicts emotional and tragic, but equally of conflicts psychological and optically spatial, must be an appropriate battleground for the skirmishes of both these optical-by-view, but profoundly psychological-by-meaning, spatial tendencies on the part of the spectator.*
>
> —Sergei Eisenstein, "The Dynamic Square"[1]

FOLLOWING THE RELEASE of *The Matrix* (1999, 2003) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) trilogies, *X-Men* and *X2* (2000, 2003), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and *Hero* (2002), it is safe to say that CGI technologies have given rise to a new generation of films that make increasing use of the screen's vertical axis. Drawing from cultural sources ranging from comic books and fantasy novels to the visual logics of video games and virtual reality, recent blockbusters deploy a broad range of digital special effects to create composite film bodies that effortlessly defy gravity or tragically succumb to its pull. In keeping with this tendency, these same films create breathtaking imaginary worlds defined by extreme heights and plunging depths whose stark verticality becomes the referential axis of many narrative conflicts. Such verticality is now pervasive enough to have become an important feature of popular cinema of the early twenty-first century and as such demands critical attention.

The following investigates what might be thought of as the spatial dialectics of contemporary cinema's vertical imagination—its tendency to map the violent collision of opposed forces onto a vertical axis marked by extreme highs and lows. Specifically, it approaches digitally enhanced verticality as a mode of cinematic representation designed to exploit to an unprecedented degree the visual pleasures of power and powerlessness.[2] Precisely because verticality automatically implies the intersection of two opposed forces—gravity and the force required to overcome it—it is an ideal technique for visualizing power. Verticality thereby facilitates a rather literal naturalization of culture in which the operation and effects of (social, economic, military) power are mapped onto the laws of space and time. Hence, in recent blockbuster films, vertically oriented bodies and objects imply a relation not just to the laws of physics but also to the spaces and times that define a fictional world's prevailing order. Vertical movement thereby gives dynamic, hyperkinetic expression to power and the individual's relation to it—defiant, transcendent, or subordinate.

This article will explore what recent (post-1996) blockbusters reveal about cinematic verticality and, in turn, what verticality can tell us about contemporary global cinema. While I will make reference to a number of popular films along the way, I will focus on *Titanic* (1997), *Hero, X-Men, The Matrix,* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.* Though the films under investigation here span a number of genres—including martial arts films, disaster films, comic-book adaptations, science-fiction films, action-adventure films, and fantasy films—and are produced in the U.S., Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan, they all share a number of characteristics linked to their insistent deployment of verticality.

To be sure, film history is replete with breathtaking falls and astonishing ascents enabled by historically available special effects, from Harold Lloyd's precarious climb up the side of a department store in *Safety Last!*

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(1923) to James Stewart's defenestration at the end of *Rear Window* (1954), and Slim Pickens' descent through the atmosphere astride a bomb in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). However, the blockbusters of the 1970s marked a turning point in the history of cinematic verticality; they deployed big-budget special effects to exploit the screen's vertical axis to a degree not seen before. While *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) capsized an ocean liner and forced its protagonists to ascend through a series of inverted sets to find a way out through the ship's upended hull, *The Towering Inferno* (1974) turned the skyscraper into an upright labyrinth difficult to exit alive, and *King Kong* (1976) staged a battle between Kong and the NYPD on the top of the World Trade Center. Films like *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman* (1978), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1979), and *E.T.* (1982) increasingly used models, miniatures, blue screens, and mattes to animate their characters' movements and desires along the screen's vertical axis, while *High Anxiety* (1977) parodied the use of the fall as a device for creating suspense in classical film.

The increasing exploitation of the screen's vertical axis continued through the 1980s and became significantly more pronounced with the development of digital special effects. In 1989, *The Abyss* used digital special effects to stage a deep-sea encounter with alien life forms: much of the film takes place on the edge of an underwater chasm plunging two-and-a-half miles to the ocean floor. In 1990, wire removal software created convincing images of bodies and matter in flight in *Back to the Future III,* while in 1993 Industrial Light and Magic's Digital Input Device animated the screen's vertical axis with towering photorealistic dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*. In 1994, the infant protagonist of *Baby's Day Out* scaled the heights of Chicago's skyline thanks to composites that synthesized the baby's blue screen image with digitized photos of the cityscape.[3] Such developments reached a watershed in 1996, when the three top-grossing films of the year—*Independence Day, Twister* (both of which used new particle animation software), and *Mission: Impossible* (for which The Computer Film Company did digital compositing, paintwork, wire removal, and tracking)—suggested that digital technology's ability to polarize action along extreme spatial coordinates would continue to develop into the new millennium.

At its most basic level, the new digital verticality is a technique for activating polarized extremes. Its abstract spatial coordinates are those of the zenith and the nadir, and its favorite location is the precipice, regardless of setting. Since the early 1990s, skyscrapers, national monuments, elevator shafts, upended ocean liners, high towers, tall (and sometimes ambulatory) trees, mountaintops, hilltop cities, and chasms all function with equal efficiency to polarize conflict, to frame possible outcomes in terms of a devastating fall and/or a willfully insurgent rise. Even when action returns to terra firma and ordinary horizontality, digitally enhanced mises-en-scène activate the screen's vertical axis: pillared interiors, banners streaming down from high ceilings, drops of water falling in slow motion, and showers of brightly colored petals and bullet casings all indicate that actions and events will inevitably follow lines of ascent and descent, thereby compounding the thematic significance of vertical movement in these films.

In the process, verticality mobilizes various connotative meanings and feelings attached to ascent and descent. Upward mobility gives dynamic expression to feelings of soaring hope, joy, unbridled desire, and aspiration; it implies lightness, vitality, freedom, transcendence, defiance, and lofty ideals. In turn, falling and sinking give expression to dread, doom, and terror and are linked to heavy burdens, inertia, subordination, loss, and the void.[4] As a dynamic device for conveying the heightened emotions to which violent conflict gives rise, the new verticality draws heavily from 1950s Hollywood melodrama's use of expressionistic mise-en-scène, and takes the genre's association of staircases with rising and falling emotions to new extremes.[5] Not only has the scale of the vertical setting expanded exponentially with the development of CGI (to, say, elevator shafts spanning more than 100 floors, or the steep incline of a volcano), but so have the stakes: frequently a struggle for the survival of an entire city (*Spider-Man, X-Men, Godzilla* [1998]) or humanity itself (*The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings, The Day After Tomorrow* [2004], *Armageddon* [1998], *Independence Day, Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* [2004], *The War of the Worlds* [2005]) is played out along spatial coordinates of extreme highs and lows. Because the new verticality vastly expands the terrain upon which (and with which) the cinema compels its protagonists to struggle, it logically favors the epic.

As the above suggests, verticality's link to gravity and the laws of space and time makes it an ideal aesthetic for dramatizing the individual's relationship to powerful historical forces. Horizontality, in this context, stands for temporal and historical continuity which, when ruptured by the upsurge or fall of a vertically articulated mass, creates a dynamized moment, a temporal–historical break that radically changes the course of events. In *Jurassic Park* the sudden and astonishing appearance of the massive T-Rex signals the

violent resurrection of the evolutionary past and the foolhardiness of the park owner's plan, as Constance Balides describes it, to appropriate "historical time for profit on a grand scale."[6] In *The Day after Tomorrow,* a wall of water crashes into and submerges Manhattan to signal an irreversible shift in the international balance of power: the United States' economic and military supremacy comes to an end, initiating a new era in which it is dependent upon Mexico. In *Reign of Fire* (2002), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Armageddon,* and *Pearl Harbor* (2001), digitally rendered danger descends from above and threatens to bring human time itself to an end. Most recently, *The War of the Worlds* imagines the end of humanity through the apocalyptic arrival of alien forces from above and below: in an astonishing special-effects sequence, towering alien tripods erupt from deep beneath the earth's surface. The machines are themselves operated by creatures driven below ground by bolts of lightning that spike down violently from stormy skies above.

When verticality finds expression through the gravity-defying body of a protagonist, it often implies a crisis inseparable from his or her problematic relation to the historical, familial, and traditional past. Whereas a protagonist's upward vertical movement is frequently symbolic of a leap towards a new future, downward verticality is inseparable from the rapid approach of an inevitable end. In some of these films, the past is represented as a burden that constrains the protagonist's freedom precisely so that powerful social and political formations may carry on, unchanged, into the future (*Titanic, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). In some cases, the past repeats itself and revives dark forces that promise to annihilate the protagonist in the not-so-distant future (*X-Men, The Fifth Element* [1997], *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Minority Report* [2002], *Van Helsing,* and *Hellboy* [2004]). Conversely, in yet another group, historical continuity and a tangible relation to the past provide the conditions of possibility for an historical agency able to overcome forces whose power stems precisely from an ability to manipulate space and time at will (*The Matrix* trilogy, *Dark City* [1998]). Since extreme forms of vertical movement inevitably involve a violation of physical laws (which then often reassert themselves), vertically oriented bodies and narratives provide the ideal form for abstracting power and representing the struggles of the emergent against the dominant—a concept neatly conveyed by the title *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*.

While the popularity of the blockbusters under consideration here can be explained in part by their presentation of astonishing digitally rendered spectacles, I would add that the "structure of feeling" invoked by verticality also causes them to resonate with contemporary audiences. Because verticality lends itself so well to the dynamic elaboration of conflict between opposed (historical, ideological, and natural) forces, it seems remarkably suitable for an era defined by economic polarization and new forms of political, religious, and military extremism, all of which seem to have had the effect (or so we are regularly told) of evacuating previously available middle grounds.[7] (The way that such global conflicts played out at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 only reinforced the link between verticality and the struggle for power in the popular imaginary.) Indeed, verticality allows these films simultaneously to acknowledge extremism, economic polarization, and thwarted upward mobility as significant aspects of their global audience's condition of existence, and to charge these crises with new visual pleasures. Even when they purport to represent actual historical events, these blockbusters feature mythological characters, breathtaking vertical terrains, and forms of embodiment—all of them more or less detached from any referent in the real world—onto which international audiences can map their conflicting identifications and emotional affiliations.[8] Precisely by defying verisimilitude, the new verticality lends these films a different sort of truth—a symbolic or emotional one that mediates present geopolitical reality.

This is not to say that previous eras have been free of either extremism or cinematic verticality. Indeed, verticality has been used to dramatize violent conflict since Flora Cameron was chased to the cliff's edge by Gus in *The Birth of a Nation* [1915]).[9] However, prior to the special-effects advances of the early 1990s, cinematic being-in-the-world remained for the most part anchored on a horizontal axis and terrestrial plane of existence, and verticality was used primarily to punctuate action and accent narrative climaxes and dramatic conflict. Recent blockbuster films exponentially extend and expand upon the cinema's ongoing exploitation of gravity's dramatic potential. Digital technologies have helped liberate many aspects of production from the laws of physics, allowing for much more pronounced and sustained exploitation of the screen's vertical axis. Hence, it seems that just as widescreen processes "created the functional grounds for a new film aesthetic based upon composition in width and depth" in the 1950s,[10] digital processes are currently giving rise to a new film aesthetic based on height and depth. As a result, verticality is no longer confined to hair-raising stunts and dramatic camera angles, but has become a cinematic mode that structures and coordinates setting,

action, dialogue, and characterization along radical lines of ascent and descent. Now characters such as Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* plunge (followed by the "camera") thousands of feet without bodily injury, displacing the long fall's dramatic effect away from the body and onto narrative. Struggles between protagonists and antagonists hinge upon the degree to which each is able to defy or master the laws of physics, making extreme vertical settings—skyscrapers, deep chasms, mountain peaks—pervasive and imperative. The resulting spatialization of power and time allows the new verticality to map spatial transience onto historical transition and radical forms of mobility onto the possibilities and perils of change.

GRAVITY, HISTORICAL INERTIA, AND INEVITABILITY

I want to begin with two extremely profitable films —*Titanic* and *Hero*[11]—that use verticality's spatial dialectics to represent mythologized historical pasts defined by the violent opposition of polarized (political, economic) extremes. By mapping complex struggles for power onto the laws of physics, verticality can make historical change a matter of inertia or inevitability. While *Titanic*'s verticality represents history as a body or force that will remain in motion along a specific trajectory unless displaced by another force, *Hero* uses verticality to make the outcome of imperial history as predictable as the operation of gravity itself. And while verticality loans some support to the "official" histories that these films appear to confirm (i.e., class conflict lies submerged in America's distant past; national greatness demands the violent suppression of internal dissent), its dual movement also accommodates contradictory interpretations.

We can begin with *Titanic,* which links its ship's forward propulsion to historical inertia and a sense that the early twentieth century was drifting blindly towards disaster. As many scholars have argued, *Titanic* depicts 1914 as a moment in American history defined by a rigid and punitive class–gender system in which a corrupt and decadent industrial patriarchy (modeled after European aristocracy) greedily pursued wealth and fame at the expense of others.[12] This world is remarkably polarized: there is no middle class (the ship offers only first- and third-class passage) and proper Victorian femininity (contrasted only by the French prostitutes in Jack's sketchbook) remains unchallenged by the New Woman. The ship's rigid segregation of classes by deck emphasizes two-tiered hierarchy and subordination from above. Aside from some minor grumblings about the tendency of first-class passengers to walk their dogs on the third-class deck, and the hushed explanation that women's choices are always difficult, acquiescence to a corrupt industrial patriarchy prevails among female and third-class passengers. Described as "a steamer so grand in scale and so luxurious in its appointments that its supremacy would never be challenged," the ship materializes both the decadent excesses of the industrial class and the arrogant presumption that it, like the *Titanic,* is unsinkable. Computer-generated tracking shots emphasize the ship's considerable length while wide shots display its smooth passage along the ocean's flat, expansive surface, linking the prevailing order with a seemingly endless horizontality. The film thereby turns the *Titanic* into an emblem of historical inertia: unless acted upon by another force, history will move in the direction of increasing imbalance of power between classes and genders.

Historical inertia is doubled by the inertia that seems to govern the fate of Rose Dewitt Bukater (Kate Winslet), whose impending marriage has been arranged purely for the profit of others: it will both enable her fiancé to come into his inheritance, and her mother to retain the upper-class lifestyle threatened by her late husband's debts. Marriage seems to reduce Rose to a mute object, incapable of action. A panning shot of the dining room at teatime shows other women gossiping animatedly about the wedding as Rose sits paralyzed, staring blankly ahead. Rose's voiceover explains: "I felt like I was standing at a great precipice with no one to pull me back, no one who cared or even noticed." Her later suicide attempt links her plight to a descent into a dark void. When asked why she tried to jump overboard, she explains: "It was everything: my whole world and the people in it. And the inertia of my life plunging ahead and me powerless to stop it." To extend the association of the bride with falling matter and social constraints with the force of gravity, Rose shows Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) her engagement ring and he comments: "God, look at that thing: you would have gone straight to the bottom."

Verticality intervenes as a spectacular figure for temporal rupture and violent historical "break." Looming high above the ship's upper decks, an iceberg's sudden appearance reconfigures the ocean's topography by activating vertical space high above and deep below its surface: it punctures the ship's hull, rushing water into it from below, and showers chunks of ice onto the deck from above. This reorganization of linear space prepares the way for the astonishing special-effects shots of the ship's stern catapulting high up into the air, converting the *Titanic*'s unprecedented length into a terrifying precipice that spurs the fall of an unjust era. Gravity therefore acts as an historical corrective in this

film: it violently undoes the flattened hierarchy of the ship's two-tiered class configuration by turning the first- and third-class decks into equivalent parallel lines aligned upright, side by side. Computer-generated long shots and point-of-view shots from the top of the upended stern show hundreds of (digital) passengers—transformed into mere objects by gravity—tumbling the length of ship to the icy waters far below. All fall to their deaths at the same speed regardless of class or rank as the ship's bow points to its new destination at the bottom of the ocean. Social determinism gives way to "mathematical certainties," and the indifferent laws of physics take control of the *Titanic*'s fate, emphasizing the idea that: "In the act of falling, history relentlessly marches on to its foregone conclusion."[13] Verticality further materializes the notion of an historical break as the ship cleaves in two before upending again and then plummeting down to the depths of the ocean floor.

That Rose's struggle for survival takes place at the stern is significant, for this site is associated with her earlier desire to give herself over to gravity and dissolution. The ship's sinking ultimately provokes her resistance to the force to which she earlier wished to succumb: she refuses to stay in the lifeboat (reserved for first-class passengers) that would preserve her identity and ends up quite literally on a new a precipice where, with Jack's help, she resists gravity's (previously alluring) pull. Verticality repeats and inverts the logic of Rose's attempted suicide: rather than escape an oppressive regime by jumping overboard, the oppressive regime is instead sent plunging into the depths of the ocean. Rose's temporary submersion ultimately dissolves oppressive social–familial ties and consigns Victorian femininity to an obscure past: kicking to the surface, she emerges from disaster as Rose Dawson, New Woman. By simultaneously resisting gravity and succumbing to its corrective forces, Rose bridges verticality's historical break to become the subject of a new history defined not by polarizations and inertia, but by middle grounds and hyperkinetic motion. While the frame narrative reveals that Rose went on to get married in the mid-West and has grown into old age as part of California's comfortable middle class, old photographs show a young Rose Dawson standing in front of a bi-plane and riding a horse in front of a roller coaster.

Critics have argued that Rose's transformation into a penniless third-class passenger who eventually rises to the middle class upholds the American ideology of upward economic mobility.[14] I agree, but would add that *Titanic* is equally concerned (as its special effects suggest) with downward mobility and that its focus upon descent simultaneously addresses a global audience for whom such myths of prosperity are untenable. Verticality is masterfully and profitably deployed in *Titanic* to charge downward mobility with unprecedented visual pleasure: not only are the most astonishing digital special effects reserved for the ship's near 90-degree inversion, but the latter facilitates a decline in Rose's social status that the film implies has only liberating consequences. Fantasies of potential and possibility are ultimately tied to a protagonist who wins by losing. Her ongoing determination to cast off the burdens of the society life she left behind is signaled when the elderly Rose tosses the Heart of the Ocean diamond into the sea—a moment that should remind us that she never was, in fact, lower-class. In contrast, Jack, who is the film's primary figure for irrepressible upward mobility, heroically slips beneath the ocean's surface. Even as the frame narrative makes the myth of upward mobility available to some audiences, the film's tendency to map mobility along a downward trajectory acknowledges that the middle class may indeed only be accessible from above. As *Titanic* suggests, verticality's spatial dialectics and dual movement allow it to mobilize extremes, elaborate struggles for and imbalances in power, and accommodate contradictory interpretations of each. In this way, verticality dramatizes and makes pleasurable the (spectatorial) position of being caught in the middle of violent conflict between polarized extremes, whatever its outcome.

Like *Titanic, Hero* represents historical shift through verticality in order to dramatize the spectacular end of an era. In this film, verticality finds its most stunning elaboration through the four assassins who attempt to end the bloody conquest of the region's warring kingdoms by the King of Qin (Daoming Chen). Digitally enhanced wire fighting mobilizes their bodies along an expanded vertical axis and works in tandem with a highly stylized mise-en-scène to map complex historical forces onto (spatially) polarized oppositions.

Hero is organized around three narratives that provide competing versions of the events that have brought the assassin Nameless (Jet Li) within ten paces, and hence striking distance, of the King. Within them, the assassins defy gravity in settings defined by high bookshelves, tall trees, mountains, desert rock formations, and cascading waterfalls, linking verticality to their obstruction of the King's plans for conquest. From the beginning, mise-en-scène supplements vertical motion to materialize the idea that history proceeds dialectically from the intersection of directionally opposed forces. When Nameless arrives at the King's court, horizontal and vertical lines clash to create a

form of graphic montage within the frame. As he mounts the stairs to the palace, his upright figure cuts sharply against the lines of the broad staircase that span the entire width of the screen. Once inside, the interior of the Great Hall is even more starkly defined by linear conflict: in one shot taken from the King's point of view, Nameless's upright figure and the palace's pillars are dwarfed by horizontally aligned ceiling beams and rows of candles that dominate the frame and appear to exert pressure upon vertical elements from above and below. The visual dominance of horizontality in the opening scene is important, for *Hero* concludes with a funeral procession that celebrates the willing demise of forces of resistance. As the narrative unfolds, increasingly graceful images of downward mobility invest the assassins' surrender of power with elegiac beauty. In this respect, verticality aids in the aestheticization of acquiescence, and gravity's inescapable pull lends a sense of inevitability to past (and future) history and to the protagonist's heroic willingness to be leveled by the forward thrust of imperial "progress."

In the first, most fictional narrative, Nameless impersonates a prefect who defeats the King's enemies—Sky (Donnie Yen), Broken Sword (Tony Leung), and Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung)—by taking advantage of a love triangle that has bitterly divided the assassins. Here gravity-defiant insurgency is linked to heightened emotions and feuds fueled by jealousy and disloyalty. These connotations are most pronounced in the scene when Moon (Zhang Ziyi) fights Flying Snow to avenge her master's murder. Throughout the scene, rage fuels vertical mobility as the combatants whirl through the air like tornados, give chase over treetops, and dive from high up in the air towards grounded targets below. Throughout the fight, bright yellow leaves rain down upon the combatants, suggesting that the unbridled passions that propel them upwards will ultimately lead to their downfall. Indeed, when Flying Snow fatally wounds Moon, the trees and the falling leaves turn blood red. Mise-en-scène appears to mourn the futility of Moon's death, giving the impression that the natural world bleeds with her. At the end of the tale none but Nameless—the King's loyal prefect—is left standing. Though the King ultimately disproves this story, it serves the broader ideological function of allowing vertically articulated bodies to stand for the warring kingdoms that suffer needlessly by fighting amongst themselves, making unity through empire appear natural and necessary.

In the second tale, the King narrates events as he imagines they must have transpired, given his knowledge of the assassins' honorable character. The King correctly surmises that Nameless, too, is an assassin and assumes that unity of purpose among the assassins has allowed him to come within striking distance of the King's throne. In this version, verticality allows the King's admiration for the assassins' willingness to sacrifice themselves for their cause to be expressed through stunning images of descent. After picturing Flying Snow's heroic death during her staged battle with Nameless (as they fight, she exclaims: "I die willingly for our cause! Please make your move!"), the King imagines a subsequent, more spectacular fight between Nameless and Broken Sword. However, this one unfolds only in their minds as a tribute to Flying Snow, whose body lies nearby on a bier. The fight takes place on a lake, the surface of which mirrors the tree-covered mountains in the background, inverting the treetops and peaks so they point to the bottom of the frame. In some shots, only the reflection is visible in the frame, orienting mise-en-scène along a downward trajectory, while in others the frame is divided between the landscape and its mirror image, between competing images of ascent and descent that match the rising and falling action. The camera cuts between images of the fighters skipping across the surface of the water like birds taking flight and wide shots of them plunging headlong towards the lake, using the tips of their swords to rebound off the water's smooth surface. Here, ascent (and with it, insurgent power) is most beautiful when followed by images of descent that aestheticize the surrender to gravity and the loss of power. Not surprisingly, then, the King's imagination privileges and aestheticizes self-sacrifice and points towards the film's conclusion in which Nameless is given a hero's funeral after he sacrifices himself and his cause to the King's ostensibly higher goals of empire.

The third and final tale combines elements of the first two: the assassins are divided not by desire and jealousy but by conflicting political ideals. While Snow and Nameless still oppose the King (their families were killed by his army), Broken Sword embraces the vision of "Our Land" and the unification of the warring kingdoms through bloody conquest. Predictably, Broken Sword's decision to succumb to the forward march of progress follows the line of descent. In a flashback within the tale, he describes the fight in which he passed up the opportunity to assassinate the King. The fight unfolds in the Great Hall among long green banners that hang from the high ceiling and match the color of Broken Sword's clothing. Here, vertically articulated mise-en-scène aids wire fighting to give outward expression to Broken Sword's desire to relinquish his part in the struggle, and thereby helps map a shift in power.

At a crucial moment, Broken Sword has the chance to cut the King's throat but ultimately pulls back. After the King realizes his life has been spared, a long shot shows the massive banners streaming gently to the floor on either side of the combatants. Opposed spatial coordinates of high and low are flattened as opposition gives way to acquiescence, allowing gravity to double for the inexorable force of China's (future) imperial history.

This force finds expression through the arrows that slice across the court when the King gives the order to execute Nameless, sacrificing him to the ideology of "Our Land." Having taken to heart Broken Sword's argument that only the King has the power to end suffering and "bring peace by uniting our land," Nameless also declines to assassinate the future Emperor and therefore forfeits his life. His execution concludes with an image that simultaneously documents the fall of oppositional power and aestheticizes its absence. The camera tracks along the Court Wall—now transformed by thousands of black arrows that protrude from a thick horizontal mass on its surface—until it reaches the empty, blank space where Nameless once stood. The negative space that gives shape to the assassin's absent upright figure perfectly emblematizes the ideology that national history always demands the noble self-erasure of insurgent forces which resist its forward movement and idealizes (self-) subordination to an oppressive regime.[15]

WALLED CITIES, MOUNTAINTOPS, AND THE FORCE OF TRADITION

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, a *wu xia* film that undoubtedly helped prime *Hero*'s enthusiastic reception by Western audiences, uses digitally enhanced special effects to melodramatize a dynamic struggle for power by protagonists whose upward verticality is linked to insurgency against ongoing traditions and the past. As in *Hero,* resistance has deadly consequences and the film ends with a willing fall. At the opening of *Crouching Tiger,* each of the main characters is poised to break from the customs and institutions that define their lives. However, the past thwarts each attempt and asserts itself primarily through the obligations of duty and revenge, both of which preserve lines of power and maintain the past in the present.

Jen (Zhang Ziyi) is about to enter into an arranged marriage certain to advance her father's career and increase her family's power. Though she appears to be an obedient daughter, she is in fact, secretly, a powerful fighter trained by the notorious Jade Fox (Pei-Pei Cheng) and is in love with Lo (Chen Chang), an outlaw bandit. Jen wishes to lead a warrior's life, which she mistakenly believes is defined by freedom from duty to others. Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat) wishes to quit his life as a warrior in order to spend it instead with Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh), and she, too, contemplates forgetting her duty to honor the memory of her dead fiancé to be with Li Mu Bai. However, loyalty to his dead master (Yi) binds Li Mu Bai to the past. At the beginning of the film, he gives away the Green Destiny sword to escape the Giang Hu underworld, but, as he notes, "the cycle of bloodshed continues" as Jade Fox's arrival in Peking forces him to avenge his master's murder. In *Crouching Tiger,* vengeance maintains the past in the present by keeping one murder alive, so to speak, until another one consigns it to the past. Though Li Mu Bai kills Jade Fox, she slays him with the same poison she used to kill his master. Rather than free Li Mu Bai to pursue a new future, the act of vengeance gives the past the power to repeat itself and foreclose upon the future altogether. As in *Titanic* and *Hero,* the struggle for power between polarized forces takes place on an historical threshold, a moment of potential transition whose upheaval is figured through vertical movement.

Li Mu Bai and Jen are defined in part by their desire to jettison traditional duties to fathers and masters in favor of satisfying individual desire. They also imagine and long for a future that departs from the traditional order of things. In the first half of the film, Li Mu Bai plans to abandon his training altogether to be with Shu Lien, but in the second half, decides to return to Wudan to train a female disciple. In turn, Jen leaves behind the obligations of aristocratic femininity to roam freely as a rogue warrior unbound by any duty to others—even the consideration of others (Qing) that Shu Lien points out is necessary for survival. Indeed, Jen rejects the traditional female virtues of both Xie and Zhen (sexual purity), gives way to Yin (excessive sexual feeling), and fails to exhibit Li (propriety or conformity to accepted standards of social behavior).[16] Not surprisingly, Jen and Li Mu Bai are the film's primary and secondary agents of verticality. Ultimately, the film is ambivalent about any complete rejection of or acquiescence to the demands of the past, for both the fulfillment of traditional duties and rejection of them have disastrous consequences.

The first vertically oriented fight scene occurs immediately after Jen indicates to Shu Lien her desire to evade the confinement and subordination of her approaching arranged marriage. In an act of rebellion that will give her a material connection to the warrior life she desires, Jen steals the Green Destiny sword. Hearing the raised alarm, Shu Lien pursues Jen over peaked rooftops, giving the chase an undulating effect that

choreographs their contrasting relation to the traditions and duties that bind present and future behavior to the past. As Christina Klein notes, whereas the dutiful Shu Lien acts as with the force of gravity throughout the scene, Jen defies gravity much as she desires to defy duty and tradition. Hence throughout the fight scene, Shu Lien counters each of Jen's vertical ascents: she knocks Jen out of the air by throwing bales of hay and pieces of brick at her; she steps on Jen's feet as Jen pushes off the ground to fly away; grabs her clothes before she soars out of reach; and scrambles up a wall to cut off Jen's ascent, demanding that she "Get down here!"[17]

Indeed, given her function as an anchor that works to keep the fight on solid ground, it is significant that throughout much of the film Shu Lien chooses to remain bound by tradition: she exemplifies filial piety to her dead father by successfully operating the security business he passed on to her (one client declares her an honor to her father's memory); she protects the interests and reputation of Sir Te (who regards her as a daughter) at all costs; and she explains that she and Li Mu Bai have forsaken their desire for one another to remain faithful to the memory of Meng Si Zhao, her fiancé and Li Mu Bai's blood brother. Rather than challenge patriarchy, her role as a warrior and security agent fulfills the principle of filial piety: she carries on her father's work in his absence.[18] If the digitally rendered walled city of Peking is an architectural manifestation of Jen's confinement by ongoing traditions and family histories far more powerful than she, then Shu Lien embodies the structural support of dutiful femininity on which tradition's continuity depends. Hence, throughout their first fight, tradition and duty—figured as the earth's gravitational pull—exercise themselves through Shu Lien, who acts as a counterweight to Jen's vertical flight.

We can compare the vertical action of this scene with the fight between Li Mu Bai and Jen atop the bamboo forest. In contrast with the rigid up-or-down verticality of the first fight (materialized in the walls and buildings of the city), the choreography of the fight in the forest is defined by the swaying flux of the bamboo trees that yield to the lightness and weight of the fighters' bodies. This pliant, bending verticality is a visual manifestation of Jen's wavering position, her suspension between courses of action: she may return to her parents and subordinate herself to tradition, become Li Mu Bai's disciple and subordinate herself to another tradition, or roam free as a masterless warrior. Whereas in the first fight scene Jen seems far more weightless than Shu Lien, in this scene Li Mu Bai floats and balances with far greater ease. Here the forest is an important element of verticality's mise-en-scène, for the trees provide a structural support for the weightless body that demands the masterful use of gravity as much as a transcendence or defiance of it. If gravity represents the force of tradition and the past, then Li Mu Bai's more powerful verticality derives in part from his connection to the traditions, training, and duties of Wudan. Hence he uses the rise and fall of the branches with far greater skill than Jen, who plunges halfway below the tree line when he shakes her from a branch. His greater utilization of gravity's force thereby implies that without some structural support from past tradition, without any master, the future is characterized by a perilous free-fall. Yet as an agent of verticality, he is also at odds with tradition. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, Li Mu Bai chases Jen into the treetops because he wishes simultaneously to carry on tradition and transform it by bringing a female disciple to Wudan Mountain.

In keeping with its ambivalence towards the new future each of the characters longs for, the film ends by suspending its protagonists between old worlds and new. As mentioned above, the past repeats itself in the present when Li Mu Bai is poisoned by Jade Fox (who thus kills off the future). Rather than using his last moments to meditate and enter heaven, Li Mu Bai chooses instead to remain a ghost, walking the earth by Shu Lien's side. This figurative suspension between two worlds, between heaven and earth, past life and future life, is visually expressed through the film's final image, as Jen jumps off Wudan Mountain. On the one hand, Jen's fall may be read as an elegiac image of an insurgent figure's fatal acquiescence to the laws of physics and hence to the laws that govern the social order she has so violently resisted. On the other, her fall might fulfill Lo's wish for them to return to the desert and a life unrestrained by family duty and class identity. Though the path has been cleared for Jen to live a life of freedom and autonomy, the film holds the future at bay, suspending the narrative and the spectator between opposing outcomes. Jen's descent through space emblematizes verticality's more general ability to accommodate ambivalence and the film's specific negotiation of—and refusal to resolve—the complicated relations between the past and the future, the desire for change and the insistent pull of tradition, and the struggle of emergent power against the dominant. *Crouching Tiger*'s concluding fall foregrounds the blockbuster's predictable refusal to pursue the outcome of verticality's spatial dialectics: rather than using its dynamic conflict between opposing powers to envision a radi-

cally new outcome, verticality ultimately remains suspended between potential outcomes or follows a downward trajectory towards an already-past, familiar future that confirms the present. In this way, verticality ultimately works not only to mobilize but also to accommodate the conflicting desires and demands of the blockbuster's broadly heterogeneous global audience.

MONUMENTAL HEIGHTS: LEAPING FORWARD, AND LOOPING BACK

Like the *wu xia* film, comic-book films have provided an ideal outlet for the new verticality precisely because their source materials have always located their polarized struggles for power in bodies that effortlessly transcend the laws of physics.[19] Similar to the other films discussed here, *X-Men* locates violent conflict between polarized extremes on an historical threshold. Set in the not-too-distant future after radical genetic mutation has precipitated a break with the evolutionary past, the film opens with a voiceover that explains: "Mutation: it is the key to our evolution. It has enabled us to evolve from a single-celled organism into the dominant species on the planet. This process is slow, normally taking thousands and thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution leaps forward." This evolutionary leap is bodied forth by genetic mutants endowed with a broad variety of powers, ranging from omniscience and telekinesis, to control over magnetic fields and the weather. Radical mutation's rupture of evolutionary time is countered by the cyclical return of a horrifying historical past via the Mutant Registration Act, a piece of legislation that echoes both the Nazi propaganda of the past century and contemporary anti-homosexual propaganda (when Senator Kelly [Bruce Davison] debates the Registration Act, he insists that all mutants be outed, arguing: "I think the American people have the right to decided whether they want their children to be in school with mutants, to be taught by mutants").

X-Men begins with a prologue set in a Nazi concentration camp in Poland, positing a cyclical continuity between the dreadful past and the to-be-dreaded future. In the opening scene, the mutant powers of Eric/Magneto (Ian McKellan) emerge as a form of resistance to the violent and broad-scale fragmentation and annihilation of the Jewish family. Demonstrated in greater detail throughout the rest of the film, Magneto's powers make him the film's primary agent of verticality. When he kidnaps Rogue (Anna Paquin), he floats down the aisle of a passenger train and then suspends Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) several feet above the ground. When ordered to surrender by police, he instead levitates patrol cars high into the air and sends them crashing down onto other vehicles below. The expectation of fascism's return in the near future (he warns Charles Xavier [Patrick Stewart]—"Let them pass that law and they'll have you in chains with a number burned into your forehead") propels Magneto upward to monumental heights. Like the vertical chase sequences in *Dark City* and *Minority Report,* the X-Men's pursuit of Magneto follows an upward trajectory that maps conflict onto spatial extremes, and shifts in power onto bodies that rise and fall: they track him to the top of the Statue of Liberty, where he plans to turn the world's leaders, positioned vulnerably below on Ellis Island, into mutants. Magneto is thereby an extreme version of a figure whose power—defined as the mastery of space, time and matter and made visible through gravity-defiance—is the expression of a desire to transcend constraints placed upon the freedom of a demonized minority. However, Magneto's anti-fascism has become so extreme that it threatens humanity's survival. And so *X-Men* intensifies the spectatorial pleasure of being caught between violently opposed extremes by triangulating its power struggle and aligning audience identification with the X-Men, who struggle to thwart the efforts of both sides.

Magneto's ascent to the top of the Statue of Liberty is an attempt to prevent not just the return of the historical past in the shape of a second Holocaust, but to escape the weight of past family history as well. By Magneto's perverse logic, forcing an evolutionary leap forward in the bodies of the world's most powerful leaders will result in a new *mutant* family unity and continuity that will compensate for the annihilation of the Jewish family. When asked why he pursues his plans even though doing so requires the sacrifice of another mutant, he explains:

> Because there is no land of tolerance, there is no peace—not here or anywhere else. Women and children—whole families—destroyed simply because they were born different from those in power. Well after tonight, the world's powerful will be just like us. They will return home as brothers, as mutants. Our cause will be theirs. Your sacrifice will mean our survival.

Here, the "returning home" of the powerful as "brother mutants" promises to break the cyclical return of fascism. Magneto seems to be driven by the idea that once he manufactures another evolutionary leap forward, the scene of family fragmentation with which the film begins may never return again (from atop the Statue of

Liberty he reasons: "Those people down there control our fate and the fate of every other mutant. Soon our fate will be their fate"). However, unknown to Magneto, his plan will first transport the powerful (and much of New York) into the genetic future but will then slowly liquefy them and return them all to a primordial ooze. Hence, rather than effecting a break from the past, his plan will instead result in a looping back, a return of humanity to its pre-historical origins. This evolutionary reversion is first represented by Senator Kelly's long fall from his cliff-top prison following his transformation by Magneto. After plunging to the ocean far below, the mutant Senator Kelly that emerges from the ocean resembles a jellyfish. Eventually, he is reduced to an entirely liquid state and splatters to the floor in a cascade of water.

When the X-Men ultimately thwart his plan, Magneto is captured and rendered powerless within a plastic prison. If within the film verticality maps the longing for a future unbound from the horrors of the past, then it also maps the inverse outcome of a return to the past. Gravity reasserts itself in direct proportion to the intensity of the desire to escape the historical and political constraints for which it stands. Verticality is not just a spatial or directional figure; rather, it is a figure for elaborating a flight from, or a return to, a former state—whether of the body, history, or narrative. Though Magneto drives towards a new future through upward verticality, such motion ultimately brings him full circle: in the end, he is imprisoned much as he was at the beginning of the film. Rather than provide clear resolution of its polarized conflict, the prison cell is a figure of narrative suspension: while it quite literally suspends Magneto over a dark void and forces a momentary cessation of hostilities, it also leaves the spectator poised between the narrative past of the trilogy's first installment and the narrative future towards which its concluding dialogue points (Magneto warns Xavier: "You know this plastic prison won't hold me for long").

SEVERED PASTS, AND SKYSCRAPERS

Science fiction's focus on the nature of time and its tendency to imagine worlds, technologies, and forms of embodiment that defy the laws of physics has made it another genre ideally suited to exploit the new verticality (prime examples include *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow, Dark City, The Fifth Element, I, Robot,* and *The War of the Worlds*). *The Matrix* is undoubtedly the film that most insistently ties vertically oriented action to the struggle for control over the laws of space and time. In it, humanity has been enslaved by a race of machines and exists in a state of suspended animation, as nothing more than a power source for artificially intelligent computers. Implicit and explicit in *The Matrix* is the idea that history operates according to horrifying cycles and ironic inversions: while images of the shackled Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) link the current enslavement of mankind to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, humanity's mechanical subordination perverts modernity's equation of historical progress with technological development. Once freed from the matrix, Neo (Keanu Reeves) struggles to rescue humanity from machine-made, simulated space and time. In turn, this struggle has evolutionary overtones: while Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) compares humans to dinosaurs and viruses, Neo (like Murdoch) will become the One precisely because he has somehow acquired the characteristics of his captors (Tank [Marcus Chong] refers to him as "a machine"). In turn, the film borrows and expands upon the vertically oriented action of the martial arts film to spatialize its protagonist's relation to time and power. Whereas Neo's powerlessness is emphasized through his fear of heights at the beginning of the film (he is first captured by Agent Smith when too frightened to climb the scaffolding to the top of the Metacortex building), his ascension to his position as the One is marked by his increasing ability to bend the laws of physics.

As in the other films discussed here, *The Matrix* does not use verticality simply for the sake of spectacle. Rather, verticality is the dynamic articulation of a desire to change the course of history, to precipitate a new future. Nearly all violent conflict with the Agents takes place along a vertical axis, from the opening scene when bullet-time sequences first display the spectacle of Trinity suspended in the air as she kicks her way out of a trap, to a later scene in which the rebels flee the hotel by sliding down through its interior walls. The spatialization of power is most evident in the scenes organized around Morpheus' rescue from the Agents, which begins with Neo and Trinity storming the lobby of a skyscraper and engaging in a shoot-out with security guards. The pillars that line the lobby materialize the film's broader theme of imprisonment and structure the vertical mise-en-scène and action of the fight sequence. As agents of verticality, Neo and Trinity create a downpour of falling shrapnel, objects, and bodies even as they defy gravity themselves. Fragments of marble and concrete, spent bullet casings, shards of glass, and water from a sprinkler system create a constant stream of downward motion that mimics the descent of binary codes seen falling across computer screens throughout the film. As other bodies drop, Neo and Trinity rise: in one of the rescue scene's many

high-angle shots, they propel themselves to the top of the skyscraper by means of the cables of an elevator car they have sent plunging to the lobby, packed with explosives.

The bi-directional movement of this shot foregrounds the link between verticality and narratives of emergence. Neo's repeated defiance and bending of the matrix's machine-made gravity (he dodges bullets, runs up walls, dangles over a digitized bluescreen cityscape, and rescues Trinity as she falls from a downed helicopter) ultimately demonstrate that he is the One, who will bring about the potential liberation of humanity. Importantly, the film exploits the skyscraper to do so. While the jagged, burnt-out spikes of the real world's city skyline represent the end of human progress, the mirrored postmodern skyscrapers in the matrix represent an inversion of the principles according to which modern progress was measured. If the upward reach of the twentieth-century skyscraper implied the limitless potential of human endeavor, the simulated skyscrapers of the matrix imply humanity's backward slide, its reduction to nothing more than the energy given off by its biological processes. Hence the simulated skyscraper filled with workers lodged in tiny cubicles simply cloaks the real-world skyscrapers of the film's twenty-second century—the massive energy towers that reduce human history to the ahistorical temporality of thermodynamics. Like some of the other films discussed here, *The Matrix* has a somewhat inconclusive resolution. While *Crouching Tiger* ends with its protagonist's downward fall, *X-Men* with a figure of suspension, *The Matrix* ends with Neo promising a future revolution in voiceover, and soaring above the city skyline of the matrix. While we might link this open-endedness with the film's position as the first installment of a trilogy, it is worth noting that the trilogy itself ends not with a triumphant victory of human over machine, but with a truce between polarized forces.

MYTHOLOGICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL THRESHOLDS

That films defined by their spectacular use of CGI should be so concerned with historical thresholds is not surprising, particularly if we keep in mind the centrality of powerful new (and sometimes alien) technologies to the plots of so many recent blockbusters in which verticality is notable. For, as theorists and historians note, CGI synthesizes "old" and "new" media and frequently provokes critical speculations about the relation of the cinema's (digital) future to its (celluloid) past.[20] Indeed, the vertical bodies under consideration here are composites of old and new, of film and digital media—and visibly so. Though the harnesses and wires that keep the actors airborne can be erased from the digitized image, the visual effects of the actual force of gravity sometimes cannot. Unless compensated for by some other dynamic motion (kicking, running up a wall) occasionally these vertical bodies retain visible traces of their true condition in space: they, too, exist in a state of suspension between the upward pull of an invisible apparatus and the downward force of gravity. In such instances, gravity's visible trace corresponds, roughly, to the state of suspension in which these characters exist within their fictional worlds *as well as* within film history. Put differently, digital verticality's occasional lack of transparency foregrounds its association with the emergent.

Through flying and falling bodies, the new verticality makes visible the position occupied by computer-generated images within the recent past of commercial film history—poised at an historical threshold, between continuity with past tradition and a future defined by aesthetic and technological change.[21]

NOTES

1. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Dynamic Square," in *S.M. Eisenstein: Selected Writings 1922–1934,* ed. Richard Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 208. My thanks to Tom Gunning for this reference and for a productive conversation about an earlier version of this article at the 2003 Film and Literature Conference at Florida State University. I am also grateful to Linda Williams and Isaac Hager for their advice on revisions.
2. In *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York: The New Press, 2004), Norman M. Klein persuasively argues that all special effects are, in one way or another, an articulation of power.
3. David Cook, *A History of Narrative Film,* 4th Edition (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 881–927.
4. For phenomenological analyses of verticality and horizontality, see Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas, TX: The Dallas Institute Publications, 2002) and Bernd Jaeger, "Horizontality and Verticality: A Phenomenological Exploration into Lived Space," *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology,* vol. 1 (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1971), 212–35.
5. On the use of the staircase in melodramas, see Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film,* ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1987), 43–68.
6. Constance Balides, "Jurassic Post-Fordism: Tall Tales of Economics in the Theme Park," *Screen* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 135.
7. I have in mind here a number of mass-mediated conflicts taking placed in the past decade or so, including the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the suppression of student protests and the Tiananmen Square uprising in Beijing in 1989, the ongoing conflict between China and Taiwan, the rise of religious

fundamentalism throughout the world, the recent unilateralism in U.S foreign policy and George W. Bush's now-notorious declaration—"Either you are with us or you are against us," the polarization of electoral politics in the U.S. (red states vs. blue), the hyper-violent discourse on terror, and the increasing disparity between wealthy and poor nations and populations, thanks in part to the increasing power of multinational corporations.

8. Film scholars argue that this is a general tendency of the blockbuster. See especially Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
9. Two notable works link verticality to historical change and conflict in previous eras. Zhang Zhen argues that 1930s martial arts films used "flying bodies" to express anxiety towards social and cultural changes precipitated by the emergence of technological modernity in China in "Bodies in the Air: The Magic of Science and the Fate of Early 'Martial Arts' Film in China," *Post Script* 20 (2001): 43–60. Ed Dimendberg argues that film noir represents the alienating effects of the American city's postwar verticality to express "longing for older horizontal forms and a reminder of the discomforts of the elevated city of capitalist commerce." *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 96.
10. Cook, 389.
11. *Titanic* made over $600 million and is the top-grossing film of all time. *Hero* made more than $217 million in China and more than $53 million in the USA.
12. See especially, Laurie Ouellette, "Ship of Dreams: Cross-Class Romance and the Cultural Fantasy of *Titanic*," and Adrienne Munich and Maura Spiegel, "Heart of the Ocean: Diamonds and Desire in *Titanic*," in *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*, ed. Kevin S. Sandler and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 169–88 and 155–68.
13. Jaeger, 225.
14. See Oullette, 169–88.
15. This aesthetic beauty of the film's images of self-sacrifice has led most reviewers to describe the film as an homage to pacifism. However, J. Hoberman argues: "*Hero*'s vast imperial sets and symmetrical tumult, its decorative dialectical montage and sanctimonious traditionalism, its glorification of ruthless leadership and self-sacrifice on the altar of national greatness, not to mention the sense that this might stoke the engine of political regeneration, are all redolent of fascinatin' fascism." "Man With No Name Tells Story of Heroics, Color Coordination," *The Village Voice* (August 23, 2004), http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0434,hoberman2,56140,20.html.
16. For a discussion and application of these Confucian principles to Chinese film, see Jenny Kowk Wah Lau, "*Ju Dou*: A Hermeneutical Reading of Cross-cultural Cinema," *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1991–2): 2–10.
17. Christina Klein, "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: A Diasporic Reading," *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 4 (summer 2002): 34.
18. For a discussion of unmarried daughters, female warriors, and their relation to tradition and modernity in Chinese cinema, see especially Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).
19. On comic-book characters and flight, see Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
20. See especially Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Michelle Pierson, *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 301–50.
21. In his article "The Impact of Digital Technologies on Film Aesthetics," Michael Allen argues that the impact of digital technologies on celluloid film form has been "a combination of change and continuity over time." *The New Media Book*, ed. Dan Harries (London: BFI, 2002), 109.

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ABSTRACT This article investigates a new cinematic spatial dialectics enabled by digital special effects. Focusing on blockbuster films from a range of genres (martial arts, disaster, comic-book, and science-fiction films), it approaches digitally enhanced "verticality" as a mode of cinematic representation designed to exploit the visual pleasures of power and powerlessness.

FILM REVIEWS

Caché

Director, Screenplay: Michael Haneke. Producer: Margaret Menegoz (Paris). Producer: Veit Heiduschka (Vienna). Cinematographer: Christian Berger. © 2004 Les Films du Losange (Paris), Wega-Film, Bavaria-Film, BIM Distribuzione. U.S. distribution: Sony Pictures Classics.

The first image in Austrian director Michael Haneke's latest masterpiece, *Caché* (*Hidden*), is a long shot of a narrow urban street, leading to a fairly nondescript house. Filmed with a static camera, uninterrupted by editing, and lingering longer than most viewers are accustomed to, this mysteriously ominous glimpse of French street life immediately sets the mood that is the hallmark of Haneke's work: discomfort, suspicion, anxiety. People come in and out of the frame, but nothing significant, or conventionally so, seems to happen. As our eyes eagerly scan the shot, we notice certain details —the gated entrance to the house, the indigo street sign that reads Rue des Iris. As any veteran viewer of this director's career knows, everything visible matters. "Rue des Iris" may indeed conjure up an image of a street filled with flowers in the manner of Jacques Demy, but in Haneke's oeuvre, it may more obliquely signify a "sadness of eyes," or the pain associated with looking. Extended vision promises knowledge, but knowledge, as Haneke will soon demonstrate, may be inextricable from individual and collective culpability.

By inviting spectators to scrutinize and survey, Haneke invokes our own potential complicity in the act of spying of which the film's very first shot is an example. Without any warning, the image on the screen begins to rewind, in a gesture that echoes Haneke's reality-blurring techniques in his earlier thrillers *Benny's Video* (1992) and *Funny Games* (1997). As it turns out, we have been watching a surveillance video that has just been deposited on the doorstep of the affluent Laurent household and is now being examined, with an unmistakable sense of violation and amazement, by the couple it is intended to terrorize, Anne (Juliette Binoche) and Georges (Daniel Auteuil). From this moment on, what is visible can never again be trusted. The status of the image—whether it be "live" or recorded, paranoid dream or repressed reality, damning or exonerating, credible or incredible, occulted or transparent —will never be anything but inscrutable.

Like Michelangelo Antonioni's groundbreaking film *Blow-Up* (1966), Haneke's *Caché* challenges naïve assumptions of ocular mastery. By depicting characters whose apparent (and, in Georges's case, professional) command of audiovisual technology not only fails to protect them from the threat of violence but directly contributes to the arrogant self-delusion that makes them susceptible in the first place, Haneke connects his critique of visual mastery to a wider indictment of Western society, culture, and politics.

In *Caché*, Haneke's assault on optics—one of the recurring motifs in his oeuvre—is aimed far beyond the sanctity of the bourgeois family, which was the director's target in his early films as well as in *Code Unknown* (2000), *The Piano Teacher* (2001), and *Time of the Wolf* (2003). As more videos arrive, along with cryptic childish drawings that feature the slit, blood-red throats of humans and animals, the unknown code of terror becomes increasingly legible. Georges, the host of a prestigious literary talk show on television, begins to suspect that the perpetrator is not an out-of-control fan as originally surmised but a long-forgotten specter from his childhood. Severing the bonds of trust with his wife—who, in spite of her successful career in publishing and their supposedly equal marriage, remains exclusively responsible for all domestic tasks—Georges keeps his suspicions hidden. While Anne attempts to keep track of the whereabouts of their moody preteen son, Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky), Georges tries to track down an orphaned Algerian named Majid who, many years before, was almost adopted by Georges's sympathetic parents.

As Georges's memories of unspeakable betrayal flood into his mind, he becomes more convinced that the grown Majid is intent on destroying him and his family. However, in spite of the blood-curdling images that plague Georges's dreams, he refuses to take either private or public responsibility for the role he played as a child in Majid's abjection. As the audience gradually learns, Majid's parents, who worked as farmhands on Georges's provincial estate, were murdered in the notorious massacre of more than 200 Algerian protesters on October 17, 1961 by Paris police (under the command of former Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon). Driven by jealousy and the possibility of being supplanted in his own home by a brown-skinned Other, seven-year-old Georges conducted a successful campaign to turn his parents against the innocent, abandoned Majid. Seized against his will and sent to an orphanage where he was deprived of the comfortable childhood promised to him by Georges's wealthy parents, Majid, or so Georges insists, has been plotting revenge on his privileged usurper ever since.

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Broaching post-colonial themes forty years after Gillo Pontecorvo brilliantly documented the resistance to the French regime in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Haneke indicates that the legacy of injustice remains an open wound in the national psyche. Although France officially bid farewell to its era of colonialism in 1962 with the hard-won independence in Algeria, the relationship between Georges and Majid is surely meant to be read allegorically: French society, and the Western world in general, has neither righted nor even ceased its ongoing subjugation of the non-white world. As demonstrated by the riots that rocked Paris in November 2005, much remains unchanged in French society since 1971, when the ban on *Battle of Algiers* was lifted, and French citizens were finally allowed to confront this account of the shameful aspects of imperialist history onscreen.

When Georges first confronts Majid, played with reticence and pathos by Haneke regular Maurice Benichou, in his impoverished apartment on the suggestively named Rue de Lenine on the outskirts of Paris, the seething, vengeful aggressor that the audience has imagined is replaced by a sorrowful, apparently gentle man who claims to have had nothing to do with either the tapes or the despicable drawings. In the presence of this soft-spoken, downtrodden man who betrays no obvious vindictiveness, it becomes harder for the audience to believe that Majid has orchestrated the psychological terrorism of the Laurents. However, when a videotape of this clandestine meeting is sent to Anne and Georges's television producer, all bets are off. On the one hand, the footage, which shows Georges as a belligerent, threatening presence, is a potentially incriminating piece of evidence that calls into question the audience's (and Anne's) initial assumptions about the true identity of the victimizer. On the other hand, the very fact that a tape has been made by a hidden camera within his low-rent flat suggests the impossibility of Majid's innocence.

In either case, the continued surveillance detonates its target, shattering the façade of marital complacency from the outside in. No longer able to trust her husband, Anne grows increasingly resentful of him and the secrets he refuses to confess. To make matters worse, Pierrot seizes the opportunity afforded by his parents' predicament to stage his own adolescent protest. After not coming home one night, Pierrot—emboldened by the appropriated rage of white teenagers everywhere,

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Georges takes his anger out on a passing cyclist

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Environments constructed to keep the world at bay

as epitomized by the looming Eminem poster in his bedroom—accuses his mother of having an affair with her boss Pierre (Daniel Duval).

As Haneke's thriller slowly unfolds, the questions posed about guilt and innocence become easier to answer, although not definitively. It remains unclear who is responsible for the tapes—perhaps Majid's son Hashem (Walid Afkir), in spite of his claim to the contrary? The larger questions about responsibility are focused on Georges and the educated, liberal class he is meant to represent. By disavowing his childhood behaviour and thereby refusing to accept responsibility for Majid's forced expropriation, Georges—whose wife has just edited a book on globalization which has been published to critical acclaim—has made himself vulnerable to his (and his nation's) unrepented past. By extension, France has done the same. Haneke suggests that First-World talk of "post"-colonialism involves denial and attempted self-exculpation—an effort to defend against any acknowledgment of continuing internal and international oppression and injustice.

Although *Caché* is by no means a sequel to Pontecorvo's film, Haneke's exquisite excavation of the French–Algerian conflict as channeled through domestic nightmare heralds the return of the bitterly repressed. There is a famous scene in *The Battle of Algiers* that is echoed in the inverted logic of surveillance in *Caché*. The French Colonel Mathieu, who is in charge of the operation to destroy the Algerian independence organization, the National Liberation Front, reviews some footage shot at one of the checkpoints put in place to restrict Muslim occupants of the Casbah from entering, and possibly bombing, the European quarter. Although film audiences recognize one of the women who is allowed to pass through as a "terrorist" responsible for bombing a French discotheque in a previous sequence, Colonel Mathieu and the other military personnel fail to identify her because she is disguised in Western dress. Mathieu is aware of his epistemological dilemma. As he explains to his brigade, they could be watching the terrorists without ever being able to distinguish them from the rest of the Arab masses. Not only does the surveillance footage fail to make truth visible, it potentially makes truth *indeterminate*. Instead of isolating a guilty party, it extends suspicion to everybody. The tools of surveillance that the technologically advanced security forces rely upon—assuming racial otherness and subversive intent will be self-evidently conspicuous—become a source of confusion.

Haneke takes this several steps further. When Georges, the privileged white subject, is made the object rather than master of surveillance technology, he becomes stigmatized by the very technology designed to protect affluent people like him from criminal and racial otherness. Once he is under observation, not only is Georges incapable of deflecting the surveillance, but he is incapable of convincing his family and his colleagues (and the audience) of his innocence. Perhaps this sense of entrapment is the larger connotation of the slogan visible on one of Pierrot's sporting posters, which reads (when translated)—"Victory at a price."

In a conservative era when besieged liberal subjectivity may in fact require defending, Haneke has chosen instead to attack the self-righteous hypocrisy of the left-leaning educated classes. Although the name of the French postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard is dropped at a cocktail party celebrating one of Anne's publishing deals, the ironies of the simulated world, which Baudrillard famously critiqued, are lost upon the Laurents. Encased with bookshelves that are stacked from floor to ceiling, their chic townhouse is a nearly exact replica of the studio set of Georges's show. Illuminated behind that show's pompous interlocutors, rows of books signify erudition to the domestic audience in spite of the fact that they are merely illusory projections of light. Conversely, in the Laurents' home, walls of actual books form a battlement to prevent outsiders from calling the self-proclaimed bobo's bluff. For Hashem, however, who accuses the literary celebrity of denying his father "a good education," books may suggest the inequity of class and racial privilege.

For Haneke, who came to movies after a long career in television—the opposite trajectory of Pontecorvo, who prematurely abandoned his activist filmmaking career for work in television commercials—screens are omnipresent. Framed by a curtain of videotapes and other media paraphernalia, the recessed television screen is a centerpiece in the Laurents' living room, transmitting otherworldly images of Mideast casualties that bear an uncanny resemblance to the hemorrhaging boy who has invaded Georges's dreamlife. In spite of all of the barriers erected to insulate the Laurents' bourgeois fortress from the threat of the Other, the television functions as a permeable interface between the internal and external worlds, broadcasting shadowy images that cast the family's private drama of retribution in a more global light. Yet Georges's ability to ignore images that displease him, as evidenced not only by his myopic disregard of the news, but also—in the scene in the television studio where he orders the tape to be cut before one of his guests waxes too theoretical—cannot

Majid's abjection

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save him from bearing witness to Majid's chilling act of self-destruction. In a society that refuses to acknowledge the humanity of those it suppresses, Majid's behavior suggests that the most powerful form of counter-attack available to the dispossessed is self-inflicted violence.

The enigmatic last shot of *Caché* crowns Haneke's astonishing closing sequence of stunning long takes with a masterful, yet easily missed logical reversal. On the steps outside his school, Pierrot is glimpsed conferring amiably with Hashem. Like the identity of the Laurents' stalker, these final images remain resolutely ambiguous. Is this the prelude to further violence? Or a friendship which symbolizes an end to an older generation's mutual antipathy? A clue to the interpretation of this scene may lie in an earlier, self-reflexive sequence in which Georges deliberately re-enters the simulated world to distract himself from the violence he has just witnessed. At the movie theater, there are several cinema posters, which ever since *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) have been used to signify the infinite regress of films within films. In a cinema showing *My Mother, Bad Education,* and *Two Brothers,* escape is elusive. The question that remains is which dyad of sons in Haneke's spectacular tour-de-force rightfully deserves to be called brothers.

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ABSTRACT In Michael Haneke's *Caché,* a successful bourgeois couple is harassed by an unknown perpetrator who delivers surveillance videos of their home to them. By allegorizing the dilemma of post-colonial France through an Oedipal drama of suspicion, betrayal, and deception, Haneke sets the stage for a taut thriller that pivots upon the return of the barely repressed.

Wedding in Galilee (Urs al-jalil)

Director, Writer: Michel Khleifi. Producers: George Khleifi, Bernard Lorain, Jacqueline Louis. Cinematographer: Walther van den Ende. Music: Jean-Marie Sénia. © 1987 Marisa Films LPA.

In a sequence near the beginning of Michel Khleifi's first feature film, *Wedding in Galilee* (1987), the village chief (Mohamad Ali El Akili), or *mukhtar,* arrives home from a difficult meeting with the Israeli military governor (Makram Khoury). As he enters the family courtyard, his eldest son Adel (Nazih Akleh), daughter Sumaya (Sonia Amar), and youngest son Hassan (Eyad Anis) are drawn inexorably and perhaps unwillingly into his visual field. The camera slowly tracks forward with the *mukhtar* and circles as he greets his wife, Umm Adel (Bushra Karaman), enfolding them all and defining them as subjects of his domain. Khleifi makes much use of this circular motif throughout the film, creating "enclosures" signifying the binding (and stifling) force of the family, and extends the family metaphor to encompass the Palestinian nation.

Wedding in Galilee is set in hill country where a conservative peasant society had become the center of Palestinian life after the war of 1948. These rural communities were structured around the village and the clan, or group of extended families, which fulfilled some of the functions of a state: control and distribution of resources, provision of security, and maintenance of order. Power and authority were exercised through a hierarchical structure extending from the male elders down to component households in which the patriarch was dominant.[1] The concept of male honor assumed great importance in maintaining codes of behavior. It was associated with possession and good husbandry of land, but it also applied to the "protection" of women, particularly against sexual "impurity." This latter meaning of honor was central to the family and community, often assuming greater importance even than the loss of land and possessions.

In these parts of society, at least, the patriarchal structure heavily inflected national identity and created different perspectives on that identity for men and women and their children. It is this context that drives the recurrent cinematic exploration of the politics of power within Palestinian culture. Much influenced by currents in Palestinian intellectual life and society, Khleifi uses the trope of a village wedding ceremony to dissect a people under military occupation.

The film opens with the *mukhtar* explaining to the Israeli military governor that he needs the curfew they are living under to be lifted so that his eldest son can be married in a fitting manner. At one level, the film proceeds as an evocation of traditional Arab or Palestinian rituals and customs, situating the community in opposition to Israeli rule. However its deeper purpose is to explore the structure of this society and its inherent tensions.

THE FAMILY AS ENCLOSURE

Khleifi's engagement with the dialectic between tradition and modernity, a key to the expression of Palestinian national identity, is reflected in the opening sequence. A jet roars overhead in a clear sky as the camera tracks down a soaring communications tower to linger on a modern office block housing the military governor. These signs of modern technology and Israeli power are set against the image of the *mukhtar,* revealed sitting in a waiting room in traditional headdress (*kaffiya*), clutching a shepherd's staff, *his* symbols of power. Following the unsatisfactory interview, the *mukhtar* returns to his village by bus, the journey filmed in a dream-like sequence where he seems to anticipate his difficult meeting with other leaders of the village. Considerable irony is achieved through juxtaposition of the two meetings, and the way they are filmed and performed. In the governor's office, the camera is placed behind the *mukhtar,* facing the governor—whose aggressive body movements and jabbing fingers emphasize the forceful way he dictates his orders to the (implied) Palestinian audience. But, though the governor is powerful, he is also uneasy, aware of the tenuous nature of his authority. By contrast, subsequent sequences, set in the *mukhtar's* house and in the communal meeting room, balance each speaker's point of view, underscoring the organic nature of power which grows out of consensus.

Khleifi has argued that "one of the great problems of Arab society [is that it] is an archaic one . . . incapable of dealing with technology, with modernity."[2] He highlights this dichotomy through his subtle geometrical design, where the circling figures and camera movements shape a structure that represents the traditional, enclosed village society. Within this, he places the unsettling, uncontrollable energy of the *mukhtar*'s daughter, Sumaya. She refuses to be subservient to the male villagers, leaving the wedding ceremony prematurely, thus mocking the power of her father. Her movements are direct and linear, always threatening to disrupt activities and to break out of the confines imposed by the

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circles.[3] Thus, Khleifi exhibits an ambivalence towards traditional power relationships and the ceremonies that nourish them. On the one hand he acknowledges that they retain important roles in sustaining national identity, on the other he seems to say that they hold back development of the nation. The *mukhtar* tries to keep society together through his dreams and plans, but his is an archaic vision, unable finally to resist the modernizing forces of the Israelis and of the younger generation of Palestinians.

The family is linked to the village in another sequence in which Umm Adel supervises the preparation of food for the wedding by neighboring women. The unhurried circling shot, tracking her around the courtyard, connects her to each of them and accentuates the communal nature of their activities. Neighbors deliver gifts for the family, accompanied by traditional rhythmic singing and dancing, and then an intricate sequence begins, showing the ritual preparation of bride and groom for the wedding. Double doors open onto the women's quarters, and the camera remains outside as the village women sing and circle around, bathing the naked bride, Samia (Anna Achdian). There is a brief insert of an old woman kneading flour for bread, before the scene shifts directly into the men's bath house, where the village men chant as they wash Adel. Alternating between the two scenes of preparation of the bride and groom, the pace quickens in anticipation of their union. A second insert shows the baked bread being put onto a baking stone at an open hearth. The bride is ready to be dressed, and the doors close again, excluding the audience from this final stage. Through these sequences, with their symbols of food preparation, marriage, and fertility, Khleifi establishes an image of unity, regeneration, and permanence in the community.

As we have seen, Khleifi's *mukhtar* is a patriarch, economically established as the holder of power in the village and master of his household. Throughout the film, he displays an obsessive love for his children and tries to impose his notions of honor and his dreams of freedom on them. But his power is challenged on all sides. At a personal level, Sumaya constantly eludes him, and rebels against his values; the young men of the village reject his political compromise with the Israeli authorities; and his son Adel, feeling "destroyed" by the presence of soldiers at his wedding, violently attempts to confront his father. Even Hassan, who has been the key connection between the family members all through the ceremony, finally runs off as his father tries again to make him the bearer of his dreams.

Through these and other examples, Khleifi criticizes the values of the patriarchal society and especially its honor code. Since Adel fails to consummate the marriage, Samia has to preserve the family honor by taking her own virginity. In so doing, she disputes conventions by raising the question: "If a woman's honor is her virginity, where do you find the honor of a man?" The filming of this scene sets Adel in a position of weakness,

The military governor arrives at the wedding

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Sumiya adorned for the wedding

© 1987 Marisa Films LPA

crouching on his haunches looking on in helpless fascination, while, by this explicit act, Samia assumes his power. Adel is not only sexually impotent, but, like his father, has failed to preserve family honor.

WOMAN AND NATION

Western stereotypes of Arab women cannot simply be dismissed in terms of exotic, mysterious, and sexually alluring images that combine to produce an extravagant display for entertainment purposes. They can also be seen to reflect a colonial fantasy of "saving" the Orient, represented as a woman, from her own backwardness and irrationality, and at the same time to suggest that only the West is capable of unveiling her mysteries. By fulfilling these needs, the Arab woman is presented as available to be possessed, she is "subliminally conceived as fallow land awaiting ploughing, as a resistant virgin coyly eager to be conquered."[4]

Such a view is prevalent in many Western narratives of the East. Women are presented as objects: passive, hidden, suppressed by a patriarchal, conservative society and by a restrictive interpretation of religious edicts. They are contrasted negatively with emancipated Western women who freely exercise their own choices. However, anthropological studies over the course of the last century reveal more complex and deeply problematic relationships within the Palestinian nation.[5]

Though the repression of women is seen by Palestinian modernizers as a major failing of traditional Arab culture, even today discussion of sexual issues —rape, incest, and extra-marital relations—remains taboo in many sectors of society. Representations of gender relations are full of ambivalence, clearly revealed by a "cluster of interlocking images . . . of women as mothers—woman as mother of the nation, life-giver, nourisher, sufferer, defender of the home, source of love, identity and continuity."[6] Much Palestinian art and literature demonstrates the variety of roles women are expected to fulfil in nation building: traditional provider to the family; partner in work; martyr; and resistance fighter.[7] The female body is repeatedly presented as a passive symbol of the homeland and "an object of yearning."[8]

The latter trope is especially evident in Arab film which often includes "the image of the helpless female victim and its equation with the robbed and violated homeland."[9] Palestinian examples include *The Veiled Hope* (1996), made by Norma Marcos, in which the juxtaposition of images of women and the desert is a metaphor for "the land of Palestine, deprived of any personal identity,"[10] and Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), where the naked body of her mother symbolizes the loss of Palestinian land as well as the loss of identity and pride.

Khleifi appears to hold the conviction that it is not possible to represent the Palestinian nation without recognizing women's contribution more fully and openly. His work consistently illuminates their "hidden" world, and remarkable women in his films challenge both the official, nationalist narrative and external stereotypes. In his early documentary, *Fertile Memory* (1980), a middle-aged woman from a rural community, a widow for over 30 years, exemplifies traditional images of nurturing and suffering. She is captured performing everyday domestic tasks of cooking, washing

clothes, making woollen thread from fleeces. At the same time, she works in a factory to support her family. Khleifi does not belittle her life as banal, rather he brings out the dignity of her work and relates it to her strength of character. She is strong-minded and steadfast in refusing to give up her title to the family land that has been expropriated by Israeli settlers. In the same film, a younger, educated woman, a writer and teacher, is shown attempting to cope as a divorcee living in an urban Arab society. Despite her evident modernity, she articulates the constraints placed on her by Arab society—political, social, and religious—and warns about their detrimental effect on the development of the nation. In *Wedding in Galilee,* while Umm Adel, the maternal figure in the rural community, defends the unity of the family, she has no role in deciding the outcome of events. Sumaya, on the other hand, asserts her freedom, even at one stage assuming the male role by trying on her father's headdress. Samia, the bride, passive until faced with her husband's impotence, plainly symbolizes the land of Palestine.

Through his exploration of women's difficult role in nation building, Khleifi demonstrates how they frequently have to assume both male and female identities. The mother and sister of Yousef in *Tale of Three Jewels* (1995) are not only supporters of the struggle against occupation, but also are oppressed within the patriarchal social structure: "On their shoulders rests the burden of the insistent, daily struggle for familial and national preservation."[11] Ultimately, though, many of the women's gestures of defiance—one refusing to surrender a worthless title deed, another taking her own virginity, yet another remaining on her plot of land while Israeli settlements crowd around—are just that, gestures, leaving the women frustrated and powerless.

Despite his achievements in bringing the role of women in Arab society to the forefront, Khleifi reveals some ambivalence by perpetuating the woman-as-nation idea in the body of Samia. Then, more subtly, he constructs different "spaces" in *Wedding in Galilee*: the exterior, masculine world of the political conflict in which all is noise, action, and movement; the interior world of the wedding couple in which sexual tension drains color and sound, and leaves the pair in a sterile, white setting; and, finally, the mysterious, warmly colored interior world of the women's quarter. Over the course of the film, Khleifi cuts between the action in these strikingly contrasting spaces, exploring different sensory data (sound, smell, touch, and color) for their male and female attributes.[12] In the "women's space" of flowers, scented oils, and rose petals, of jewellery and soft, embroidered materials, a female Israeli soldier, Tali (Tali Dorat), is laid out to rest. She has made silent appearances from the opening scenes to the conclusion. An emancipated woman, single, with a career in the army, and working alongside men as an equal, she represents the rationality of modern society. But, at the wedding feast, overcome by the heat, the food, and the noise, she faints and is swept off by the village women to their quarters.

One interpretation of these juxtapositions between the male and female worlds, suggested by Khleifi himself, is that it is an exploration of the dialectic between strength and weakness. He claims to want to show that the failure of traditional male-dominated Arab society is due to its rigid and archaic structures

Adel disempowered before Sumiya

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and its disregard for women's rights. He implies that the feminine side of Arab society is much stronger and more purposeful than the masculine.[13] Critics largely agree with such an interpretation of *Wedding in Galilee,*[14] but Khleifi's ambivalence is evident in his association of the modern, rational Israelis with the exterior, masculine world, and the emotional, irrational Palestinians with the interior, female world.[15] Nonetheless, he is greatly concerned to represent women's part in developing the Palestinian nation, taking them out from their veiling layers, and giving their lives considerable prominence throughout his work.

In much modern Palestinian literature, women's voices are not heard: there is what could be called a monologic discourse of patriarchy where the male voice dominates and excludes women.[16] The language, even during the *Intifada,* largely fails to question standard images of women.[17] Khleifi's work resists traditional stereotypes of Arab women while engaging, to a greater or lesser extent, in a critique of patriarchal society. At the same time he opens up a political space in which women are seen to contribute significantly to the building of the nation. But, if women are to express themselves and resist patriarchal repression, if they are to be strong and to carry the burden of the daily struggle to preserve the family and the nation, and if they are to represent the land of Palestine, then Samia's question in *Wedding in Galilee*—"where do you find the honor of a man?"—becomes ever more pertinent. As women become subjects of resistance they cease to function as objects of national symbolism and male honor. What, then, becomes of man's role in the construction of Palestinian national identity?

THE ABSENT MALE

In many nationalisms the cultural representation of nationhood is synonymous with masculinity and heroic male action. A canonical example is the image of actor Paul Newman, in the leading role in the Hollywood film *Exodus* (1960), emerging half-naked from the sea, the idealization of Israeli manhood designed to counter the centuries-old image of the downtrodden diaspora Jew.[18] But for defeated and traumatized nations this heroic role is unattainable except through martyrdom, and the failure of the male population to defend the land and to protect women and children frequently appears in film as metaphorical emasculation.

A typical expression of defeat and the consequent loss of power occurs in *Wedding in Galilee.* The *mukhtar,* forced to invite the Israeli soldiers to the wedding, fails to prevent their "penetration" of the village, and his people. This results in the constant presence of the soldiers at the feast, causing strife among the men—and, more significantly, also causing the union of Adel and Samia to fail, paralleling the failure to create a cohesive community and, by implication, a Palestinian state. An alternating series of cuts from the exterior world, where tension between the villagers and soldiers is rising, to the interior world of the wedding couple, brings these themes together. A soldier moves from house to house through the darkened village, searching for Tali, at the same time as Adel confronts the *mukhtar,* forcing him to retreat and destroying his dreams for the future. The echo of the soldier's footsteps intrudes on Adel and Samia as they try but fail to make love. He peers into windows and doors, seeming to see the young boy Hassan also reject the *mukhtar*. And he knocks at a door just as Samia takes her own virginity. The simultaneous emasculation of the *mukhtar* and Adel is profoundly linked to the intimate intrusion of Israelis into the villagers' space.

The trope of the failed, powerless, or absent male is evident throughout Palestinian films. Rarely is action motivated by a heroic male figure. The missing men are in prison, in exile, or working abroad. Where they appear, they are rendered weak and ineffective by Israeli controls on their activities. The Man in Khleifi's documentary-drama *Canticle of the Stones* (1990) has writer's block, and cannot finish the various novels he has started. He is an elusive figure, appearing and disappearing, frequently filmed against the light so that his features are weakened. In *Tale of Three Jewels,* the father of the young boy, Yousef, is left demented by imprisonment, one neighbor is blind, another obsessed with his collection of significantly caged birds. Powerlessness is embodied in confinement and the liminality of Palestinian existence. The adult Palestinian male has proved incapable of protecting the family, preserving the land, or being instrumental in retrieving autonomous power.

Earlier, I suggested that *Wedding in Galilee* is constructed around a set of interior feminine spaces and exterior masculine ones, where the exterior spaces belong to the occupying Israeli force. This would appear to support Hamid Naficy's analysis that, for exilic filmmakers, such spaces are predominantly coded as feminine.[19] In part, Naficy attributes this to the conditions under which they are forced to work, but I would argue that they are, more accurately, representing the political impotence in Palestine following defeat and the consequent loss of power. Many adult males have been systematically reduced to a state of compliance by confinement and repression, and women have taken on the burden of daily struggle and survival. It is the young who then begin to assume a major role in maintaining Palestinian national identity.

PALESTINE'S CHILDREN

Though the traditional structure of authority in Palestine, the patriarchal political leadership, played an important part after the defeat of 1948 in sustaining "vital elements of the sense of community and solidarity" in Palestinian society, and women took on a more important role after 1967, the late 1970s witnessed "the political coming of age of the child."[20] In highlighting the role of the young in the struggle, Palestinian filmmakers mark a general shift in perceptions of national identity, from the nostalgia of the generation whose memories are of Palestine before 1948, to the active resistance of the generation that has grown up since 1967 and has known nothing but Israeli rule.

Wedding in Galilee concludes with the villagers throwing whatever they can lay their hands on into the path of the departing Israeli governor and his soldiers. In a closing sequence, gunfire off-screen accompanies the boy Hassan as he runs and stumbles through the darkness, until he eventually collapses to the ground. Panting, he watches the dawn light appearing over the hills as the film ends. Released in 1987, this ending prefigures the first *Intifada,* which started later in the same year as a popular uprising against military rule and as a statement of Palestinian identity. It also suggests the new responsibility of the young as they are precipitated into the heart of the conflict with Israel. The image of young, unprofessional fighters, faces masked by *kaffiyas,* began to dominate news of the conflict. These "children of the stone . . . ready to confront Israeli soldiers openly and head-on"[21] acquired the stamp of the martyr, and their deaths served to increase revolutionary fervor among the Palestinian population.

But, unlike generational conflicts in more stable societies, it is not simply a matter of the young wresting power from their elders—it is the inability of parents to protect or even provide properly for their children that has politicized the younger generation. Khleifi weaves resistance activities, killings, defiance by the young into the fabric of *Tale of Three Jewels,* and in *Canticle of the Stones* he records the stories of school closures, of children being shot, of soldiers breaking the arms of women and children, and of bullet injuries incurred during the *Intifada.* None of the adults is able to prevent these things happening to their children; they can only stand by and weep. The children, on the other hand, have become accustomed to the artefacts of war.

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Tale of Three Jewels: Aida carrying the dreams of Yousef

This generation, which has never known peace, which in many cases has never known the lost lands and homes of Palestine, and whose history has been stifled through the closure of schools and universities, has had to *derive* its culture. Palestinian children, in the absence of visible evidence of their history, attempt to construct an identity through their imaginings of Palestine. Beginning with *Wedding in Galilee,* where the young boy, Hassan, listens to the stories of the grandfather and grandmother about times before partition, and his father's dreams of recovering the lost lands, Khleifi's films are filled with the young "learning" history from their elders. *Tale of Three Jewels* includes stories, dreams, and fantasies that make up the young boy's world. Yousef is assailed by the memories of his blind "uncle," the stories of his mother, his sister's account of Palestinian history, and an old grandmother's tales of Jaffa before the war. He dreams of the warrior-hero Saladin on a white horse, riding on the beach and handing him a gun to fight with, and of his mother and sister embroidering a shawl with doves of peace which fly away. The core of the film is his fantasy of Aida, the mysterious gypsy girl, with whom he falls in love. She will only marry him if he finds the three lost jewels from her grandmother's necklace. In his dream, the jewels are transformed into three drops of blood, symbolizing "time, space, and the flesh," or as we might say, "history, land, and the people," which Yousef, the Palestinian child, clasps in his hand, uniting them.

Khleifi's work, especially *Wedding in Galilee,* has exposed to a large audience the complexities and diversity of various sectors of Palestinian society that constitute the nation. While doing so, he has had to counter reductive stereotypes, most prevalent in the West, and the homogenizing forces of nationalism that diminish differences within the community. In this, he has largely been successful.

Yet, I would argue, his films have a wider purpose. They associate individuals, the family, and the clan with the nation, to the extent that they can be said to enunciate national identity through the narratives of family

relationships. We see the struggle for women to assert their rightful position in society and against the constrictive nature of the male honor code. Also evident is the diminished role of the adult males and the growing importance of the young in the continuing battle for autonomy from Israeli domination.

But, as in many communities which have been until recently predominantly rural, there is a reluctance to abandon entrenched traditions and social structures that help to reinforce people's identity and provide a sense of security in the absence of state institutions. Khleifi reveals the deep tensions within Palestinian society between the conservative forces of tradition and the democratizing effects of modernity. Ambiguities present in his films reflect the considerable difficulty in negotiating the transition from one form of society to the other, especially where the continuing existence of the nation is precarious.

NOTES

1. This discussion draws on the work of Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honor: Palestine Women in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); Nahla Abdo, "Nationalism and Feminism: Palestinian Women and the Intifada—No Going Back?," in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Society,* ed. Valentine Moghadam (London: Zed Books, 1994); Frances S. Hasso, "Modernity and Gender in Arab Accounts of the 1948 and 1967 Defeats," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000): 491–510; and Andrea Barron, "The Palestinian Women's Movement: Agent of Democracy in a Future State?," *Critique* 11, no. 1 (spring 2002): 71–90. Thanks are also due to Dr. Alison Butler, Dr. Alastair Phillips, and Professor Rosemary Foot for their insightful comments on this paper.
2. Coco Fusco, "Allegories of Palestine: an Interview with Michel Khleifi," *Afterimage* 16 (1988): 14–16.
3. See Khleifi's discussion of the film's structure in Frédéric Sabouraud and Serge Toubiana, "La Force du faible: 'Noce en Galilée,' entretien avec Michel Khleifi," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 401 (November 1987): 111.
4. Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 100.
5. See Abdo's book (in addition to many other works), and Warnock.
6. The forms of cultural expression examined by Warnock include poetry, music, dance, crafts, painting, and the theater (52–53).
7. Dov Shinar, "Art and Communications in the West Bank: Visual Dimensions of Palestinian Nation Building," *Studies in Visual Communication* 10, no. 2 (spring 1984): 2–15. Vara Tamari, "Palestinian Women's Art in the Occupied Territories," in *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience,* ed. Ebba Augustin (London: Zed Books, 1993), 65–66.
8. Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi, "The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 3 (spring 1978): 92–100.
9. Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: University of Cairo Press, 1988), 181.
10. Livia Alexander, "Conflicting Images: Palestinian and Israeli Cinemas" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2001), 52.
11. Ella Shohat, and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 277–78.
12. Antoine de Baecque provides the valuable insight that the film exhibits affinities to Arab architecture, an "architecture of the senses," which "makes 'cousins' of stone and cloth, tiles and cushions, the rigid and the shifting," in "L'Architecture des sens," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 401 (November 1987): 46.
13. In his *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview about *Wedding in Galilee,* Khleifi states that "Mon film, comme une maison arabe, c'est un jeu entre la force et la faiblesse" (Sabouraud and Toubiana, 111). In a later interview he elaborates: "The problem of women is the problem of the Middle East. When the Middle East tries to be masculine, it makes a mess. Many conquerors came here and destroyed it. It's like rape. The Middle East must accept that it is feminine," Howard Feinstein, "Arab Films at Pesaro Festival," *Cineaste* 20, no. 2 (1993): 3.
14. For example, Ella Shohat reads the film as Khleifi's plea for transformation from aggression to peace, in "Wedding in Galilee," *Middle East Report* 154 (September–October 1988): 44, while Shafik sees it as an inversion of traditional ideas, "linking putative female weakness with power and male power with weakness" (200).
15. This separation of male and female worlds is very close to Laura Mulvey's description, in "Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity," in *Sexuality and Space,* ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 55.
16. Hanan Ashrawi, for example, writes of the "notable absence" of a feminist perspective in Palestinian culture in *The Palestinians: New Directions,* ed. Michael C. Hudson (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 81.
17. See, for example, Abu Ghazaleh, "Gender in the Poetry of the Intifada," in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank,* ed. Suha Sabbagh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), for an analysis of a significant body of poetry produced during the *Intifada.* Both male and female poets help sustain the view of women as biological entities designed for childbirth; as passive recipients of action; and as emotional, domestic creatures, without a voice and dependent on men.
18. Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 1–3.
19. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 154–55.
20. Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 88.
21. *The Palestinian People: A History,* ed. Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 297.

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ABSTRACT Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* continues to astound, nearly 20 years after release, with its clear-sighted analysis of the forces constraining the development of Palestinian society. Transcending dogma, the film calls for internal change and for space in which the people may advance their rights for self-determination and the creation of a Palestinian state.

The Cyclist (Bicycleran)

Director, Writer: Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Cinematography: Ali Reza Zarrindast. Music: Majid Entezami. © 1987 Janbazan Foundation.

In 1997, as he was leaving a retrospective on the films of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Canadian film critic Donato Totaro overheard one enthusiastic viewer remark: "ça, c'est cinéma d'auteur."[1] As international admiration has grown for the achievements of the Iranian film industry during the past two decades,[2] so too has the stature and prestige of Makhmalbaf. While Abbas Kiarostami remains perhaps the most well known and respected of Iran's filmmakers, the enormously talented, eclectic, and imaginative Makhmalbaf is clearly the leading figure among the new generation of Iranian directors.

As remarkable as his films are, Makhmalbaf's background and path to filmmaking are perhaps even more so.[3] Growing up in a deeply religious, lower-middle-class family, he became a dedicated and active Muslim revolutionary in his early teens. At seventeen, his failed attempt at killing a policeman landed him in jail, where he remained until 1978, when the Shah's government crumbled. Upon his release, he served in the Islamic government, selecting people to fill various ministerial positions. Very quickly, however, his hopes for a new Iran were shaken, as he watched the various factions emerge in the struggle for power. "Fascism took hold. And I decided right then that even if we were to undergo thirty more revolutions . . . until our culture undergoes an essential change, nothing will be altered."[4]

After six months, he left government service to work in radio as a writer. Here again, factionalism dominated, as three groups vied with one another to present their message to the public. It was during this period that Makhmalbaf disassociated himself from all political organizations. Despite the continued efforts by the various groups to win him over, he refused to join any of them.

However, regardless of his disillusionment with revolutionary politics, Makhmalbaf remained dedicated to the ideals of the revolution. When his position at the radio station ended, he decided that he could best aid the revolution through art. Condemning both pre-revolutionary and secular art as corrupt, he dedicated himself with the fervor of a committed ideologue to creating a true Islamic art. In 1982, with little formal education, having spent a month studying the technical aspects of filmmaking, and without ever having handled a camera before, he made *Nasuh's Repentance*. While this film and the two that followed supported the ideals of the revolution, Makhmalbaf's increasing dedication to art seems to have shaken his ideological certainties. By about 1984, he was also becoming disillusioned with the new government, which, he felt, was committed more to rhetoric than to making necessary changes in Iran

Questioning what he had previously accepted without question, the absolutes that had composed his world view gradually gave way to subjectivism where "there is no center of truth . . . I've moved toward life and humanity, away from deadly serious subjects."[5] No longer associated with any political or religious movement, Makhmalbaf today uses his stature to encourage others to thoughtfully make their own choices rather than uncritically following others, including himself.

As he surveys his life to this point, he presents it as a series of dramatic changes that directed and clarified his focus. "When I was a child, I started going to the mosque; I wanted to save humanity. After growing a little older, I wanted to save my country; now, I think, I make films in order to save myself."[6]

What accompanies Makhmalbaf's remarkable transformation from an Islamic revolutionary to a humanist artist is a striking openness, and a passion to discover as many points of view as possible on a given subject. In discussing how he educated himself about filmmaking, the former ideologue explains that: "I used the same method I had used in prison, something that I'd learned from the other prisoners. It was to collect everything I could on a certain topic, read it all comparatively, and come to some conclusion."[7] This approach helps to explain Makhmalbaf's personal and extremely eclectic style. In contrast to his first films, which revealed the filmmaker's inexperience and lack of formal training, those of his second period, which dates from about 1986, clearly benefited from his extensive reading about filmmaking techniques and from the availability of video archives that the revolutionary committees had established. Although he claims that literature was more important than films in his development and has a poor opinion of most of those he watched, he does think highly of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), and Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (1987).[8]

Having lost confidence that the revolutionary government would improve peoples' lives, Makhmalbaf made three films in this period which address social problems. One of these is *The Cyclist* (1987). It appeared at numerous film festivals and won the Best Film Award at the 1989 Rimini Festival and the 1991

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Hawaii Festival. In many ways, this film is the work of a man who is beginning to hit his stride as a filmmaker.

This film, like so many other post-revolutionary Iranian films, is very much in the Italian neorealist tradition. This style focuses on ordinary, usually working-class, people struggling with a single large problem. Most, if not all, of the action occurs on location and usually outdoors. The environment in which the action occurs can best be described as secular and humanistic. Even though Iran is a thoroughly Islamic country with a very visible and influential clergy, religion has little place in these films. The main characters must resolve their problems using their own natural abilities. They do not look for divine or ecclesiastical aid, nor do they receive it. Moreover, these films emphasize individualism. While the main characters are part of a highly structured society, they receive little if any help from other people or from social institutions. They struggle with a problem that is of enormous importance to them, but is of little concern to society. And finally, these films tend to be open-ended. Although Iranian films usually end with a sense of optimism while Italian neorealist films tend to be pessimistic or tragic, neither offers clear closure. For better or worse, life goes on, and the audience is left to speculate about what follows.

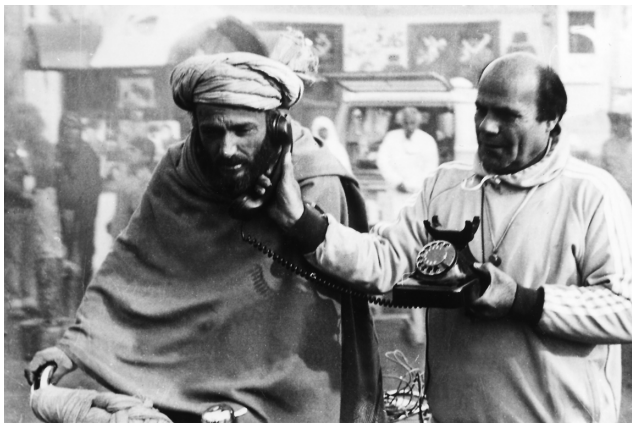
The film was inspired by an experience from Makhmalbaf's youth.[9] When he was ten, a Pakistani cyclist—"A tall thin man with a black top coat and a tired face"[10]—came to Tehran and proposed to ride for ten consecutive days to raise money for flood victims. Viewers paid a small fee to enter the coliseum. Within a few days, a bazaar appeared with merchants hawking their wares. Many in the crowd were skeptical of the entire enterprise, believing that the cyclist slept when people went home for the night. Deciding to discover the truth for themselves, late one night Makhmalbaf and some of his friends managed to sneak out of their houses and into the silent and darkened coliseum where "the cyclist was cycling all alone as if he is doing it for god's [sic] eyes."[11] By the seventh day the cyclist collapsed and rumors spread that he had died. The bazaar remained, however, continuing to do a thriving business.

In making *The Cyclist,* Makhmalbaf transformed his main character into an impoverished Afghan immigrant, Nasim (Moharram Zaynalzadeh) With his wife Aya (Samira Makhmalbaf) suddenly hospitalized and needing an operation, he desperately seeks a way to pay for her medical care. Accompanied by his young son Jomeh (Mohammed-Reza Malecki), Nasim wanders the streets looking for an opportunity to raise money. At one point he even fakes a suicide attempt in order to gain sympathy and money, but to no avail. Eventually he comes to the attention of a disreputable entrepreneur who has learned that in Afghanistan, Nasim was an endurance bicycling champion, having ridden for three consecutive days without stopping. Sensing an opportunity to make money, the man proposes that if Nasim can ride for seven straight days, he will give him the money for Aya's operation. With no alternative, Nasim accepts the offer and the entrepreneur immediately makes plans to enclose a vacant lot in order to charge an admission fee, as well as encourage betting on the outcome of Nasim's ordeal.

In many respects, *The Cyclist* has much in common with the greatest of Italian neorealist films, *The Bicycle Thief.* Each film concerns the plight of good but impoverished men, Nasim and Antonio Ricci, and bicycles are the means of solving their problems. For Nasim, completing a seven-day marathon will provide the money for his wife's operation. For Antonio, the bicycle will provide employment putting up posters in Rome. After years of being unemployed, he finally has the opportunity to support his family and regain his self-respect. Accompanying each man is a devoted young son, Jomeh and Bruno. Furthermore, these men live in societies with widespread poverty where people are so absorbed with their own welfare that they have little awareness of or interest in the concerns of others. Although institutions such as the police, the church, and government are prominent in these societies, they are of no help to either Nasim or Antonio.

For Antonio, the problem begins with the theft of his bike on his very first day at work. In desperation, he first reports the incident to the police, but quickly realizes that for them the theft of a bike is a very minor matter. When asked by a reporter what the issue was, the officer taking down Antonio's information responds: "No, nothing, just a bicycle." Although labor unionists do offer to help, their well-intentioned but almost comical search for bicycle parts in an open-air market has no chance of success. And when Antonio follows an elderly colleague of the thief into a church, the officials there show no interest in what Antonio has to say, and inadvertently help the old man to escape.

Having done everything possible to recover the bike but with no success, Antonio gives in to desperation and visits the apartment of an elderly neighborhood woman believed to possess supernatural powers. Early in the film, when his wife had turned to the same woman for help, he disdainfully asked: "How can a mother of two children and a head on her shoulders



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Nasim receives a warning to end his marathon

think about such nonsense, such stupidity?" Now, it is he who offers the woman money only to be told: "Either you find it now, or you won't find it."

In *The Cyclist,* Makhmalbaf presents a society that is perhaps even more uncaring and materialistic than that of *The Bicycle Thief*. To emphasize this point and add a touch of reflexivity to the film, he shows some of his characters watching a television showing of Sidney Pollack's 1969 depression-era film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* It, like *The Cyclist,* presents a world where the weak and vulnerable have only themselves to rely upon, and at every turn people find ways to benefit from the misery of others.

From the very beginning, Nasim encounters only coldness and formality. Even those one might expect to be sympathetic to his plight are abrupt and dismissive. The doctor who informs him of his wife's condition insists on payment before performing the operation. "If she dies," he says, "it's not my fault." And when Nasim holds out what little money he has, a hospital official curtly rejects it because it is Afghan money.

Once Nasim begins the bicycle marathon, a circus atmosphere develops as both rich and poor flock to the tiny arena to be entertained, inspired, and to look for opportunities to make money. Almost immediately a fortune-teller and barber set up shop, while a hawker of nuts and crackers makes her way among the spectators. A blind accordianist, who it turns out is not blind, performs for small tips. And a motivational speaker brings his impoverished followers to be inspired by Nasim's ordeal.

While the activities of the humble contribute to creating a rather colorful and festive atmosphere, those of the rich and influential introduce a dark and perilous element to the spectacle. These men wager large sums on the outcome and are not prepared to lose graciously (even though initially both sides took steps to ensure that the competition was fair).

They install a referee to keep a round-the-clock watch and a physician to periodically check Nasim's urine for stimulants. As Nasim perseveres, and it seems increasingly likely that he might actually complete the seven-day marathon, those who have bet against him attempt to sabotage the outcome. One has a truck drive into the arena and dump a load of bricks in Nasim's path. (Rather than end the competition, the entire audience, with the cyclist at its head, parades to another venue.) Another bribes the physician to drug Nasim's tea. As it turns out however, his nurse switches drinks and the doctor falls asleep instead. Still another stops young Jomeh in the street and offers to pay Aya's bills if he convinces his father to end his ride. And towards the end, in desperation, another has tacks thrown on the track, flattening the bike's tires. However, those who have wagered on the other side quickly produce another bike, and Nasim pedals on.

Dishonesty is certainly not confined to one side. Nasim's backers are equally prepared to fix the outcome. Late one night, when the arena is largely empty, and the referee has dozed off, Nasim himself collapses from exhaustion. The promoter of the spectacle rushes over, drags the barely conscious cyclist to his underground dwelling, and has one of his own men cover his face with Nasim's scarf and ride in his place. Then, with a knife in hand, he walks over to the "blind" accordianist, who has silently observed the entire incident, and says: "You betray me and I'm gonna cut your throat. No one knows you're not blind, but me." Calmly the accordianist reassures him: "I've bet on his winning myself." Although the referee awakes shortly afterwards, he never notices the switch. Later, the rejuvenated Nasim somehow returns undetected to his bicycle to continue the marathon.

As those in the audience each pursue their own goals, Nasim amazingly perseveres. Exhausted by his ordeal, he endures cold, rain, sleep deprivation, and sabotage attempts without complaint. Towards the end he even resorts to using toothpicks to prop his eyelids open. Only Jomeh cares for him, bringing him meager nourishment. The only time he shows animation and pleasure is when he hears the crowd, led by the shady businessman, call out his praises. "Nasim does wonders. Nasim does wonders." During these brief moments, the cyclist smiles and waves in acknowledgment and gratitude. The conclusion of the film is especially striking. With someone throwing water on Nasim, and his son slapping his face to keep him awake, the exhausted

cyclist somehow completes the final lap of his ordeal. As word spreads that victory is at hand, the crowd swells and becomes more animated, shouting his praises. Members of the media arrive to broadcast the details of this remarkable achievement to the nation. At the very same time, the entrepreneur who had arranged the entire event absconds with the money, leaving Nasim victorious but unable to pay for his wife's operation.

It is really at this point that Makhmalbaf parts company with De Sica by choosing not to end his film on a tragic note even though he easily could have done so. After all, despite fulfilling his part of the agreement, Nasim does not receive the money for Aya's operation. In *The Bicycle Thief,* despite all his efforts, Antonio fails to recover his bicycle and in desperation attempts to steal one. However, passersby chase him down and refrain from handing him over to the police only because they feel pity for the weeping Bruno, who has witnessed the entire event and rushed to be with his father. As the film ends, father and son walk silently home, hand-in-hand. The experience has left Antonio even worse off than he was at the beginning. He is not only unemployed again, but he has violated his own values and has humiliated himself in front of his son.

Makhmaklbaf does not choose a tragic ending, but he avoids a conventionally happy one as well. Nasim does not triumphantly end his cycling, embrace his admiring son, and go to Aya's hospital bed. Instead, quite remarkably, he continues to circle the arena, oblivious to his son's cries that he has won and can finally rest. No longer hunched over the bike, expressionless, with barely enough energy to move the pedals, he now sits erect, looking refreshed, and riding with ease, animated by the shouts of praise from the admiring crowd: "Nasim is a hero . . . He is a legend." A television camera follows his movements, and a newsman reverently asks him: "What is your opinion about prosperity?" Having achieved what seemed unachievable, the man who, only a week before, was an insignificant and pathetic figure, has suddenly become a hero and a wise man.

In the wake of this newfound attention and adulation, it seems that Nasim has taken on a new persona. No longer the impoverished and desperate husband and father, he has become "Nasim the Marathon Cyclist," and "Nasim the Wise" whom people turn to for answers. His priorities now lie with his remarkable natural talents that have won the praises and admiration of his audience, and perhaps, with the help of the media, the entire country.

Certainly *The Cyclist* and *The Bicycle Thief* end with their major problems still unresolved. Nasim must still try to raise the money for Aya's operation just as Antonio Ricci must continue to seek employment to support his family. While it is certainly unclear how or whether either man will achieve his goals, what is clear is that Nasim has already triumphed spiritually. More animated and self-confident, he is emotionally better prepared now to address his problems. For Antonio, the opposite is the case. Having suffered defeat and humiliation, one wonders whether he will ever generate the energy to secure employment in postwar Italy.

NOTES

1. D. Totaro, Mohsen Makhmalbaf: Retrospective, September 18, 1997, http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9709/offscreen_reviews/makhmalbaf.html.
2. For good discussions of the achievements of the Iranian film industry, see the articles in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation, and Identity,* ed. Richard Tapper (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).
3. See Makhmalbaf's extended interview with Hamid Dabashi. H. Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future* (London: Verso, 2001), 156–212. Also, H. Dabashi, "Dead Certainties: The Early Makhmalbaf," in *Iranian Cinema,* ed. Tapper, 117–53.
4. Dabashi, *Close Up,* 179.
5. Ibid., 188–9.
6. Ibid., 211.
7. Ibid., 185.
8. Interestingly, he has little regard for *Citizen Kane* (1941), and "people who say it is a great film are idiots who are afraid of being found out." Ibid., 186, 195.
9. For Makhmalbaf's full discussion of this incident, see Makhmalbaf Film House: Movie Section, http://www.makhmalbaf.com/movies.php?m=22.
10. Dabashi, *Close Up,* 5.
11. Ibid., 6.

STEPHEN WEINBERGER is Professor of History and Film Studies, and chairman of the History Department at Dickinson College. His primary interest is censorship and film."Joe Breen's Oscar" was recently published in *Film History*.

ABSTRACT Mohsen Makhmalbaf, onetime Iranian revolutionary and self-taught filmmaker and humanist, has made a series of highly acclaimed and deeply personal films. *The Cyclist* has much in common with the style and content of Vittorio De Sica's neorealist classic, *The Bicycle Thief*. However, despite the similarities, Makhmalbaf, like his fellow filmmakers, has made neorealism distinctively Iranian.

BOOK REVIEWS

Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood

By Robert S. Birchard. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. $39.95. 430 pages.

Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood tells us much more about DeMille's films than about Hollywood. But one of the pleasures of Robert S. Birchard's book is how one comes away from it with a feeling for how closely DeMille's long career was intertwined with the entire rise and fall of the studio system. By the year that his second version of *The Ten Commandments* was released in 1956, California had designated the "Lasky Barn"—where DeMille set up offices for *The Squaw Man* in the rural Hollywood of 1913—as the state's "Historical Landmark No. 554." With commercial blockbusters across five decades, DeMille was around long enough to look back on his early work as history. His self-awareness, indeed his sense of self-importance, had side benefits, not least for the survival of his early films. Like Hitchcock later, DeMille was a director known personally to moviegoers, especially in the 1930s and 40s from his Monday evening hosting of Lux Radio Theatre ("Greetings from Hollywood . . ."). Because of his self-promotional flair, one thinks of DeMille as an independent producer beholden to few, but for most of his career he was a savvy player in the studio system, usually at Paramount Pictures—for whose formation and success he felt underappreciated.

At first glance, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood* looks like a book that no one but a reviewer would read cover to cover. It takes up the films chronologically, a chapter for each, and is biographical only to the extent that the life touches the filmmaking. It will find use as a reference text, but it is also something more than that. What is most impressive is the author's deep knowledge of Hollywood's business practices. The book is particularly good at sorting out the confusing financial dealings of early mergers during the first feature-length years. The full credit note heading every chapter usually includes costs for each film, as well as its profit or loss—figures impossible to obtain for most Hollywood films.

The preface sets out questions that the chapters circle around to answer: how to account for the enduring career? Was DeMille a cynic? A showman? A misunderstood idealist? An artist keenly in tune with audiences? Did he start as one sort of director and evolve into another? It has always been easy (too easy) to dismiss him as a Hollywood hack. The way that Birchard's book is weighted suggests, however, one way of redeeming DeMille: the first 230 of its 360 text pages are devoted to the silent films, to the first sixteen years of the director's career. Indeed, this book is only possible in the form it takes because of one extraordinary thing about DeMille's films: they almost all survive, thanks to his own sense of their worth. He kept prints of all but a handful of his 52 silent films in a vault at his Hollywood home; his family later turned them over to George Eastman House, which continues its work to preserve them. DeMille argued in a 1956 speech to the Producers Guild that: "The industry will not come of age until it makes a determined effort to keep its own great classics—and to present them regularly to the public in a manner worthy of their merit and worthy of the great names who made them." If DeMille included himself high among the "great names," and his films among the "great classics," that pride was rare enough in an industry that routinely tosses out its past. John Ford's public modesty about his work is an appealing counterpoint ("I'm John Ford—I'm a director of Westerns," as he famously introduced himself in a blacklist-era dispute with DeMille), but that yeoman's modesty may not be unrelated to the loss of virtually all of Ford's early work. DeMille is one of only three silent-era directors for whom one can still contemplate such a film-by-film book (Griffith and Chaplin would be the others), and beyond that, he is the single director whose surviving films allow one to track a complete history of the Hollywood industry from its first explorations of multi-reel length through the battles with television.

There is thus the largest of opportunities and challenges here, and it would be quite an accomplishment if Birchard's book had been able to meet them. It doesn't, finally, but is still the most useful volume about this central figure. Birchard tosses around background details that speak of a wide knowledge of Hollywood and an evident immersion in the DeMille papers at Brigham Young University. This is an indispensable starting point, especially for an investigation of the director's early work.

DeMille's way of pulling out all the stops, of bypassing winking irony for straightforward sentiment, suited silence better than dialogue. He started directing only five years after Griffith, but unlike most of his peers from that era (Vidor, Ford, and a few others excepted), he neatly negotiated the transition to sound. If Birchard's book gets less compelling as it proceeds, that's less the fault of the author than of the films. DeMille's first features are distinctive, for instance, partly because of their innovations in mood lighting. But in the sound films it's exactly the lighting, so flat and overbright (and later so oversaturated with color), that tends to simplify the dramas. Even by the standards of the era, DeMille's early pace and energy was extraordinary: in 1915, he wrote scripts for eighteen feature-length films and directed thirteen of them, as well as parts of several others. It is true that one has to search deeply to find much wit in his work, although his silents include sophisticated, proto-Lubitsch comedies, such as *Don't Change Your Husband* and *Why Change Your Wife?* Ultimately, however, DeMille learned that there was greater box-office success in period history than in contemporary America—or that his style worked at its best there. His "costume pictures" carried into the sound era a heavy, slow-cut style that always read as "important" back in the silent era.

Birchard, a film editor and documentary director, does not reach beyond a functional prose style—and at times one's head begins to swim with the numbing parade of details that can sometimes lapse into trivia. Still, there's seldom a wasted paragraph and, even at 430 pages, it's a tight book. The author is unafraid to pass judgment on the films and the director's

failings—and most of those judgments seem valid—although he tends to have, or reveal, fewer opinions about the sound films, perhaps because he expects readers to already have a pretty firm idea of what they think of such films as *Cleopatra* or *The Greatest Show on Earth*. What's frustrating is that most of the chapters read like factual build-ups to deeper analyses that never quite arrive. Rather than exploring, say, the dark politics of *This Day and Age* or the perverse racial intricacies of *The Cheat,* the author seems embarrassed for DeMille and rushes onward. There thus remains a need to synthesize the fascinating facts that Birchard unearths. His book is sealed against academic scholarship and makes not even passing reference to the one other serious work about DeMille: Sumiko Higashi's *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (University of California Press, 1994). Still, Birchard provides chapters on silent films that Higashi never mentions.

At their best, DeMille's films rely on a melodramatic madness, a dream vision presented to us as if it were the most inarguable logic—as in *Madame Satan* or *Fool's Paradise*. It's easy to presume that one knows all one wants to about Cecil B. DeMille from his historical epics, but as Birchard argues convincingly, there are discoveries still to be made in some of DeMille's remarkable, forgotten silents, such as *Kindling, The Golden Chance,* or *The Godless Girl*.

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Chris Marker: Memories of the Future

By Catherine Lupton. London: Reaktion Press, 2005. $25.00. 256 pages.

Chris Marker has been one of the most influential figures in cinema since the 1950s—a legendary pioneer of documentary, the essay film, and new media. Several recent texts testify to his sustained influence in Europe, including Birgit Kämper and Thomas Tode's fine anthology in German, *Chris Marker: Filmessayist* (Institut Français de Munich/CICIM, 1997), and Guy Gauthier's French text, *Chris Marker: écrivain multimédia* (L'Harmattan, 2001). Yet in English-language scholarship, Marker has barely been discussed, save for the occasional encyclopedia entry or introductory textbook reference. A few anthology chapters have looked at more famous films such as *La Jetée* (1962) or *Sans soleil* (1982), but to date the full scope and complexity of Marker's work have not been considered in English.

In the lucid and accessibly written *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future,* Catherine Lupton endeavors to introduce English-speaking audiences to Marker's influential body of work. Side-stepping the cliché of trying to define the reclusive auteur himself, she instead surveys Marker's oeuvre, attempting to "cover all the different phases of Marker's career and provide a systematic discussion and analysis of his works." Somewhat frustratingly, she delivers on only half of this.

The text offers a valuable overview of the many phases of Marker's career, but it lacks the level of analysis that the complexity of his work demands. Nevertheless, an introductory survey—a daunting task in itself—is a giant step toward acknowledging Marker's importance. Marker has almost 100 films to his credit and, as Lupton notes, "a degree of confusion or uncertainty surrounds his involvement in a number of projects." She wisely chooses a chronological approach that in six short chapters does indeed cover all the phases of Marker's work, and traces his trademark themes through each phase, including the ways he questions images, makes the familiar strange, interrogates cultural memory, reckons with new media technologies, and alludes to his own films and to those of others.

Each of the four central chapters of Lupton's book fittingly corresponds with a key phase of Marker's career. Chapter two, "Travels in a Small Planet," describes the early travelogue documentaries of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including *Sunday in Peking* (1956), *Letter from Siberia* (1957), and *Cuba sí* (1961). Because Marker refuses to release films from this early period for distribution, most of them are only available in French archives; Lupton's concise recounting of them is therefore quite valuable. Chapter three, "A Moment in Time," delves more deeply into two of Marker's most influential pieces from the early 1960s, *Le joli mai* (1963) and *La Jetée*. These two films receive more substantial analyses (almost half of the chapter) before Lupton returns to the short descriptions that constitute most of the book.

The following chapter, "A Grin Without a Cat," tackles Marker's most progressive, militant phase. This chapter lists his string of "SLON" collective films of the late 1960s and the 1970s, including the early homage to Alexander Medvedkin, *The Train Rolls On* (1971). It also cleverly compares *The Embassy* (1973), a political allegory ostensibly documenting the Chilean coup, to the earlier *La Jetée* in light of the fiction/documentary line that both walk. It is here that Lupton first invokes the book's subtitle, thoughtfully observing that "on a deeper level, both films play with temporality to shift memories of the past into memories of the future: the favored Marker trope of looking back at the present from the vantage point of the future." The chapter concludes with a quick recounting of *Le Fond de l'air est rouge/Grin Without a Cat* (1977). Unfortunately, this film's aesthetic and political complexities cannot be addressed in such a cursory fashion and so are ill treated by the project's abbreviated method.

This is doubly true for Lupton's treatment of Marker's masterpiece, *Sans soleil,* in the chapter "Into the Zone." The sheer complexity of this film, which Lupton herself describes as "Byzantine" and "labyrinthine," is ill suited to the quick survey format. However, this chapter does adeptly consider the implications of Marker's shift from 16mm to video in such works as *2084* (1984) and *The Owl's Legacy* (1989), and Lupton notes especially well how these videos maintain a commitment to Marker's familiar thematic tropes. She is also particularly perceptive when describing the difficulties Marker faced when trying to document the legendary Akira Kurosawa for *AK* (1985).

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The book's final chapter is arguably Lupton's sharpest consideration of Marker's works; as the "big finish" chapter, it also claims the book's subtitle, "Memories of the Future." Marker's experiments with digital media in the 1990s benefit here from Lupton's evident commitment, shared by Marker, to the promise of new media technologies. Her astute discussions of the multimedia installation *Zapping Zone* (1990) and the CD-ROM *Immemory* include both clear descriptions and insightful criticism, if not interpretation. And although her discussion of *Level 5* (1997) is largely description, her analyses of *The Last Bolshevik* (1992) and *Silent Movie* (1994) are possibly the most considered and poignant in the book.

Strangely, the text is both well illustrated and not. With 147 high-quality, black-and-white illustrations, it includes a fine variety of frame enlargements and installation photographs. However, not all are captioned; many are identified only via the list of illustrations on the last four pages of the book. Their placement near each film description indicates that the shot must be from this film, though frequently the text does not describe that shot. Those who have studied Marker's works will easily recognize these images, but many readers will need to take extra steps to identify them.

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Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique

By Marilyn Fabe. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
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Marilyn Fabe, a popular veteran film lecturer at Berkeley, wants to open the "rich visual and aural complexity of the film medium" to non-specialists, "to provide [them] with the analytic tools and background in film theory that will help them see more in every film they watch" (xv). She does so through close analyses of shots and scenes in 14 films, most of them well-established cinema classics: *The Birth of a Nation, Battleship Potemkin, The Last Laugh* and *The Adventurer* (a Chaplin two-reeler), *His Girl Friday, Citizen Kane, The Bicycle Thief, The 400 Blows, Notorious, 8 1/2, Annie Hall,* and *Do the Right Thing.* The book concludes with analyses of scenes from two more contemporary and off-beat films, Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* and Mike Figgis's *Timecode.* Most of these discussions are adapted from Fabe's lecture notes, and that fact points to the book's major strengths and weaknesses.

In thirteen chapters, the author deftly analyzes one or a few key scenes in each film while defining and explaining how the basic but necessary concepts of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound function within the given scenes and the film's overall context. Each chapter builds upon the next, as Fabe introduces bits of film history, defines new terms, and leads her readers quickly and succinctly through key theoretical concepts from Soviet montage to Bazinian realism to auteur theory, postmodernism, and feminist film criticism. In fact, her one-paragraph explanation of Lacan and Derrida (in relation to *Annie Hall*) is as concise and clear a set of definitions as general readers are likely to find (175).

Fabe's discussions of the films are generally solid, although they will hold little surprise for anyone who has been through an introductory film course or read some of the many existing analyses. She openly confronts the racism of *The Birth of a Nation* while also demonstrating how the film's power stems from Griffith's artistry. She leads readers through a detailed examination of the Odessa Steps sequence; she places Murnau's expressionist techniques in contrast to Bazin's insistence on realism, with *The Adventurer* as an example of how an apparent lack of "cinematic" style can be fully cinematic in itself. She summarizes the objections of early sound theoreticians to talking pictures while demonstrating how *His Girl Friday* is prime evidence of the power that sound can bring to film. In alluding to Hawks' own status as auteur, Fabe unfolds auteurism's fuller implications with her examinations of Truffaut's and Hitchcock's films. Discussions of neorealism in *The Bicycle Thief* and modernism in *8½* lead naturally to Fabe's analysis of *Annie Hall* as a postmodernist film (perhaps the best analysis in the book).

Throughout these chapters, she constantly reminds us of cinema's inherent voyeurism and of woman's role as object of the camera's gaze, culminating in her final two chapters on *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* and *Timecode.* Those last

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two chapters are the among the most interesting, if only because they will introduce many readers to Rozema's film and prompt them to reevaluate Figgis's digital experiment, shot on four separate cameras simultaneously in "real time." Fabe makes a good case for *Timecode,* a commercial failure dismissed by many critics as little more than an extended gimmick.

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In discussions of some other films and scenes, there are omissions of contextual material that could deepen readers' understandings. Fabe discusses Truffaut's personal relationship with Bazin, but ignores Truffaut's own father-role to Jean-Pierre Léaud, and her references to the director's homages in *The 400 Blows* totally ignore the importance of Jean Vigo's *Zero for Conduct.* While briefly alluding to Carl Jung's influence on Fellini (154), Fabe's discussion of *8½* does not follow up on the importance of the Jungian "anima" to the Saraghina sequence or the film as a whole. She describes Radio Raheem's "LOVE" and "HATE" brass knuckles in *Do the Right Thing* as "scarily reminiscent" of Robert Mitchum in *Night of the Hunter* (204), but fails to note that Raheem has a speech that actually paraphrases Mitchum's in the earlier film. Indeed, by placing Lee's film in the context of Eisenstein's dialectics and more or less ignoring Lee's desire for a "Black aesthetic," the analysis of this film is the weakest of the book.

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Such variations do help to prevent these analyses from falling into a monotonous lockstep with each other, but the inconsistencies also contribute to a sense of the book as a collection of pieces, rather than the unified approach to film viewing suggested by the book's title. That sense is reinforced, when in some cases—notably *Potemkin* and *Notorious*—the scene being discussed stops short of its conclusion or immediate aftermath, which is crucial to a fuller understanding of both scenes. Most annoyingly, the text retains verbal markers of its origin in classroom lectures: phrases such as "as we have seen . . . ," "I'd like to conclude with a discussion of . . . ," and so on, recur throughout the book. Literate non-specialists in film can certainly learn a great deal about film and these individual movies from Fabe's book. Whether this is the best place to start is another matter.

DONALD F. LARSSON is a professor of English at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he teaches film, literature, and humanities courses.

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Cowboys As Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History

By Stanley Corkin. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004. $23.95. 273 pages.

Cowboys As Cold Warriors treats Western movies as one of the major constituents of American political culture from 1945 to the beginning of the Vietnam War. The idea is not a new one: John Lenihan's *Showdown* (1980) related Western themes to McCarthyism; Philip French's *Westerns* (1973) drew analogies between particular films and the political styles of Cold War presidents; and my own *Gunfighter Nation* (1992) saw the genre as the source of the cultural myths that led us into Vietnam. Stanley Corkin draws effectively on these earlier studies. What is new about his book is the systematic way in which he relates Western scenarios to theories of nation-state politics and to the evolution of policy ideas in Cold War think tanks, universities, and the national security apparatus.

His discussion of *Red River* in chapter one is a good example of his method. He frames the film with an analysis of the American role in shaping the postwar world economy, starting with the negotiations at Bretton Woods in 1945. The goal of U.S. policymakers was to open the international economy to American corporate initiatives. But their ambitions for the extension of American political and economic power were modified by their experience of the Depression and New Deal, and the rise of Hitler, which left them with grave concerns about corporations lusting for unregulated expansion and nations bent on a monopoly of power. Hawks' study of the cattle baron Tom Dunson reflects "a fascination with the

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development of a business strategy that rewards centralized production and the seeking of far-flung markets." Dunson's vision of a great ranch producing beef for hungry Americans enables him to create a successful business and overcome the post-Civil War depression. But the individualist passion that enables him to create his business and launch the drive to win new markets evolves towards megalomania and dictatorship —and (not incidentally) threatens the economic success of the enterprise. The ultimate success of the venture requires a compromise between Dunson and the more moderate and democratic regime of his adopted son, Matt Garth. The film thus serves as an arena in which ideological concerns of a fairly complex kind are projected and solutions play-tested.

Corkin shows how the development of U.S. responses to the Cold War unfolded, and were then reflected in new kinds of Westerns. His first chapter deals with the establishment of the postwar economic order, and brings in *Red River* and *My Darling Clementine*. Subsequent chapters trace the initial formation of Cold War foreign policy, modeled in Westerns as a choice between "masculine" (or coercive) and "feminine" (or consensual) approaches to establishing an American "empire" or hegemony (*Duel in the Sun, Pursued, Fort Apache*); and growing concerns about the necessity and the danger of relying on military force or violence (*Broken Arrow, The Gunfighter*). These chapters are the most interesting and original in the book, in part because Corkin uses them to develop his discussion of political theory, rather than piling all the theory into an introduction, as most writers do. Moreover, this is the period in which the fundamental structures of Cold War policy were being quietly established in government offices and think tanks, before the high drama of Korea, the New Frontier, and Vietnam.

The three chapters that trace the movement from Korea to Vietnam tie Western scenarios to the increasingly militant concepts of American nationalism that were being developed during this period. Corkin emphasizes the emergence of a theme to which earlier writers (myself included) may have given insufficient weight: the sense that the U.S. was in decline, relative to the Soviets. Kennedy's response was to summon Americans to conquer a "New Frontier": to roll back Communist gains in the Third World by applying the theories of political and economic "modernization" developed by W.W. Rostow and other policy intellectuals. Westerns, more subtly, framed the heroism of gunfighters and cowboys—traditional agents of progress—against the image of a vanishing West, the loss of a world of untrammeled possibilities. In contrast to the ideological simplicities of modernization theory, the films register a complex cultural response that accepts progress but also counts its cost. In a sense, the films are "smarter" than the policy intellectuals about the resistance modernization theory would face, in the U.S. as well as in the Third World.

Rather than use a "counterinsurgency" Western like *The Magnificent Seven* to set up U.S. intervention in Vietnam, Corkin frames the decision with three movies that mourn the loss of the cowboy's West: *Lonely Are the Brave,* Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country,* and John Ford's ironic elegy, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.* Though *The Magnificent Seven* may be a better allegory of the direction of policy than *Ride the High Country* or *Liberty Valance*, Corkin's choices highlight the way that films work by dramatizing and evoking *desire*—political as well as romantic. What attracted Americans to the "New Frontier" of Vietnam was not the prospect of displaying the technical expertise of the Seven. Rather, it was the desire to recover the lost possibility of heroic achievement that the West had embodied.

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The one major limitation of the study is its too brief treatment of the linkage between the international politics of the Cold War and domestic racial politics, especially the civil rights revolution. The liberalization of racial politics was a direct response to the imperatives of the Cold War, the struggle for the "hearts and minds" of the non-white peoples of the Third World. Westerns were uniquely important during this period because the genre allowed artists to simultaneously engage the domestic struggle to redefine the color line and the international conflict between Communism and Americanism. Balance Corkin's book with Armando Prats' *Invisible Natives: Myth and Identity in the American Western* (2002) and you have a complete picture of the Western's relation to Cold War America.

RICHARD SLOTKIN, Olin Professor of American Studies at Wesleyan University, is the author of three historical novels and an award-winning trilogy on the Myth of the Frontier in American mass culture: *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973), *The Fatal Environment* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation* (1992). His most recent book is *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality*.

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Giant: George Stevens, a Life on Film

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Except for Donald Richie's slender monograph, *George Stevens: An American Romantic* (1970), and a few articles, Stevens has been generally ignored, even though he has produced an impressive body of work. But Stevens aficionados can now rejoice. Drawing on the riches in the George Stevens Collection at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences, Marilyn Ann Moss has transferred Stevens from Andrew Sarris's "Far Side of Para-

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dise"—a limbo for such dissimilar types as Anthony Mann, Otto Preminger, and Robert Aldrich—to, if not Sarris's Pantheon, then the egalitarian Olympus right next to it.

Giant, which combines biography, production history, and criticism, is infused with the kind of humanism that only someone with a literary background (Moss holds a Ph.D. in American Literature) and an understanding of film could write. Unlike many literary scholars who use cinema to discuss adaptations of plays and novels (often at the expense of the film, which is dismissed as a mere version or simulacrum of the original), Moss respects directors like Stevens, who have tried to achieve visually what writers such as Booth Tarkington, Theodore Dreiser, and J.M. Barrie accomplished through language. The word, written and spoken, was Stevens' first medium. His father was an actor–producer with his own company; his mother, an actress. As a result, Stevens was exposed to the entire theatrical spectrum, from melodramas to the classics. Having learned the art of storytelling from the stage, Stevens discovered he could transfer the same techniques to the screen. His artistic evolution paralleled that of the American film—from silent shorts to sound series, and finally features.

Moss has provided the most detailed account of Stevens' apprenticeship on record—from the Hal Roach years and his work with Laurel and Hardy (silents and talkies) to his emergence as a serious director at RKO, a studio without a discernible signature and eclectic enough so that he could experiment in various genres. Versatility, however, can make an artist an anomaly, hard to categorize and therefore unclassifiable. We can speak of John Ford's mythic West, Henry King's picture-postcard America, Joseph L. Mankiewicz's life as theater, and Billy Wilder's life as operetta—sometimes sleazy or besotted, but always with a "meet cute." But how does one describe George Stevens? "Whitmanesque?"

Although Marilyn Ann Moss does not exactly call George Stevens "the Whitman of American cinema," she implies that Stevens, like Whitman, heard America's varied carols—Whitman recording them in torrential verse; Stevens turning them into images that enhanced "the iconography that defines the American experience in the movies." Stevens was neither an elitist like Mankiewicz nor a mythographer like Ford; he heard America singing—but in multiple, and often overlapping, voices.

It was with *Alice Adams* (1935) that Stevens was able to dramatize the frustration of being confined to a class, as if it were a cocoon from which it was impossible to emerge a butterfly. Stevens understood Alice, as played by Katharine Hepburn, whose mandarin line readings made the character's plight all the more poignant. Alice's desperation to transcend her class is alternately comical and heartbreaking, but not tragic. Neither Tarkington's novel nor Stevens' film, which reflects America's movie-inspired belief during the Great Depression that the barriers separating the classes could fall like Clark Gable's "Walls of Jericho" blanket, ends in tragedy. Alice gets her Prince Charming in the movie and goes to secretarial school in the novel.

Alice Adams and *A Place in the Sun* (1951) stand as bookends enclosing Stevens' America. If there is any film that skewers the American dream, to the point of warning the commoner to stay clear of the princess (especially if he has obligations to a woman of his own class), it is *A Place in the Sun.* In her brilliant explication of the crucial scene in which Alice (Shelley Winters) stands up in the rowboat, causing it to capsize, Moss argues that Stevens shot the scene in such a way as to suggest that Alice caused her own death, for which George Eastman (Montgomery Clift), thanks to his tangled skein of deception, will pay with his life.

Moss places special emphasis on the impact of World War II on Stevens, who, as a major in the Army Signal Corps, felt it was his obligation to document the deadliest conflict of the twentieth century. He entered Dachau two days after it was liberated, and what he learned about the Holocaust haunted him for the rest of his life. Understandably, Stevens was drawn to Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich's adaptation of Anne Frank's *Diary, The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955). Although the dramatization downplayed the horrors of the Holocaust for a 1955 audience, Stevens' film version, which arrived four years later, at least made it clear that the camps existed. Asking Stevens to do any more on the screen than Goodrich and Hackett had done on the stage would be like asking him to portray the banality of evil in its most virulent form—something no studio would have touched in the 1950s, or even later.

Feminist critics should note how Stevens, in such films as *Alice Adams, Annie Oakley* (1935), and *Vigil in the Night* (1940), managed to wrest control of the narrative from the male so that the woman's voice is audible. From its title, *Woman of the Year* (1942) would seem to be another nonpatriarchal film. However, the studio-dictated ending—in which Katharine Hepburn as the multi-lingual Tess Harding fails miserably in her attempt to make breakfast for Spencer Tracy, thus emerging as a klutz in the kitchen—was intended to make homemakers feel superior to an intellectual who cannot make coffee, and to get bread-winners to question the rationale behind educating women who cannot cook. Hepburn found the *Woman of the Year* ending offensive, calling it "the worst bunch of shit I've ever read" (as Kenneth Geist notes in *Pictures Will Talk: The Life and Films of Joseph L. Mankiewicz* [1978]). As beloved as *Woman of the Year* is in some quarters, it cannot compare with the two films Stevens made for Columbia at the same time, *The Talk of the Town* (1942) and *The More the Merrier* (1943), which are more typical of his vision of America.

Moss's *Giant* represents the kind of scholarship that is enriched by access to special collections and the kind of criticism that no mere poring over memos, letters, and balance sheets can achieve. There was a time in higher education when the phrase "a gentleman and a scholar" was a commonplace. Marilyn Ann Moss is a critic and a scholar. May her tribe increase.

BERNARD F. DICK teaches in the School of Art and Media Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University and has just completed a biography of Rosalind Russell.

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Godfather: The Intimate Francis Ford Coppola

By Gene D. Phillips. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. $65.00. 424 pages.

In *Godfather: The Intimate Francis Ford Coppola*, Gene Phillips—veteran cinema writer whose estimable accomplishments include three books on Stanley Kubrick, studies of George Cukor, Alfred Hitchcock, and Ken Russell, and *Creatures of Darkness: Raymond Chandler, Detective Fiction and Film Noir*—opens his authorial arms wide to embrace and apply the art and practice of biography and critical study. Phillips' presentation of Coppola's life and his analysis of all the director's films are impeccably researched and written in lively prose. The author acts as storyteller, film scholar, prudent revisionist of Coppola's larger-than-life past-recorded history, and even as first-person guide (some may find the "I" intrusive) to make a point or lead the reader in a useful direction.

Coppola is a treacherous challenge for a book-length work that attempts to put his chaotic career into perspective. He has been risk-taker, visionary, technological guru, director of the iconic *Godfather* films and the infamous *Apocalypse Now*. Film scholars continue to probe for critical significance and the raison d'être behind his extravagant production methods. He has been portrayed as a diva, hired gun, Kamikaze producer, independent filmmaker, sell-out, has-been, wine baron, and padrone to a new generation of directors. Phillips' book is marked by an honest appraisal that rises above the hyper-context of Coppola's media history and eccentric behavior.

Phillips classifies Coppola as a rebel in the dedication: "For Stanley Kubrick, the ultimate Hollywood maverick." He then reprints, as the foreword, an article by Walter Murch, Coppola's long-time sound designer and editor, that defines Coppola as an artist from an insider's view (a chronology also offers an overview of Coppola's life and work). The author-to-subject relationship in the rest of the book does not fall into the clear-cut categories of authorized or non-authorized: Phillips conducted an interview with Coppola at Cannes; the director read the project précis and all published interviews for fact-checking. While benefiting from this cooperation, Phillips retained final determination of the contents, and read original archival screenplays and production journals for an accurate account of the making of each film.

By charting progress step by step, Phillips demonstrates Coppola's will, business acumen, and penchant for absolute artistic control. He begins by recounting the young director's exploits in the nudie genre, but in a less provocative way than earlier biographies, emphasizing Coppola's struggle to enter the film industry rather than focusing on any scandal. When the narrative reaches *The Godfather,* Phillips alters the established linear structure by jumping forward to the story, process, and analysis of the entire Corleone odyssey, which catapulted Coppola to the top ranks of New Hollywood and into the annals of American movie mythology. Coppola's most artistically challenging works, *The Conversation* and *Apocalypse Now,* as well as the life-changing impact of instant power and money that arrived with *The Godfather,* are covered later. This interrupts the chronology but allows Phillips to thoroughly deconstruct the trilogy as a single cinematic accomplishment.

The same thematic organization is applied to Coppola's Vietnam films. In the chapter "The Unknown Soldiers," Phillips looks at *Apocalypse Now, Apocalypse Redux,* and *Gardens of Stone.* In tracking the chaotic production and directorial methodology (which became a metaphor for the seemingly unending war) and *Apocalypse Now*'s great personal and financial toll, Phillips presents the facts and then arrives at an objective film analysis without lingering on the urban legend that has engulfed this landmark work.

Earlier biographies (*On the Edge: The Life & Times of Francis Coppola,* by Michael Goodwin and Naomi Wise; *Coppola: A Biography,* by Peter Cowie; and *Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmaker's Life,* by Michael Schumacher) tend to view all Coppola films as extensions of a feverish and flamboyant personality. Phillips doles out more measured evaluations by harmonizing Coppola's actions with actual results. Assessed in this way, Coppola loses a little of his colorful persona, but the films gain a sober reading that supports his achievements. Where other biographers follow Coppola on an emotional roller-coaster with uneven outcomes and illogical decisions, Gene Phillips keeps his wits throughout the hype and melodrama of Coppola's exploits to reveal an ambitious artist who is more likely "crazy as a fox" than just plain crazy. He believes that previous biographers did not give adequate critical attention to films other than the canonical *Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now,* and sets out to explore the themes, narrative conventions, and the interrelationship between form and content in Coppola's oeuvre. This is one of the most discerning aspects of the book.

A strong and convincing effort is made to correct the record. One of the most egregious errors Phillips uncovered is in the Cowie biography, which places Vincent Mancini (Andy Garcia) in *The Godfather Part III* as the illegitimate son of Michael Corleone, although there is narrative evidence in the first and third installments that Sonny Corleone fathered the child.

Phillips also contends that the theme of family is a central metaphoric and autobiographical element in Coppola's work, that the director created family units within his theatrical and moviemaking endeavors. Italian-American culture is often the source of familial dynamics. Coppola also identified with super-bugger Harry Caul in *The Conversation,* a man at the center of a community of surveillance professionals—outcasts who struggle to communicate within their circle. And Coppola's American Zoetrope functioned as studio system controlled by an artist with a company of actors and craftspeople bonded by utopian ideals—but like most families, it had its dysfunctional aspects.

Because Phillips dares to eschew any one particular biographical model, parts of this book may not sit well with some readers. By trying to move to the center in depicting Coppola as a shrewd and dedicated artist, Phillips does, at times, rationalize the director's more outlandish behaviors—downplaying, for instance, his infamous megalomaniacal

staff memo concerning studio operations and the editorial madness behind the postproduction of *Apocalypse Now*. But *Godfather: The Intimate Francis Ford Coppola* finally gives this much-maligned figure his rightful seat in the pantheon of late twentieth-century film directors, not for one work alone, but for his contribution to the future of the medium.

VINCENT LOBRUTTO is an instructor of editing, production design, and cinema studies in the Department of Film, Video, and Animation at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. His most recent book is *Becoming Film Literate: The Art and Craft of Motion Pictures* (Praeger, 2005).

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Hardboiled & High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture

By Linda Mizejewski. New York: Routledge, 2004. $88.00 cloth; $19.95 paper. 272 pages.

This book is a readable, well-researched, and interesting survey of predominantly recent fiction, television shows, and movies that feature the "woman detective." Although the "amateur female sleuth," Mizejewski notes, has been around for generations (think Nancy Drew and Miss Marple), only in the past few decades has the "*professional* female character" become a notable presence in American popular culture (2). Pointing to the popularity of the various media incarnations of FBI agent Clarice Starling (the book begins and ends with discussions of the novel and film versions of *The Silence of the Lambs* [1988, 1991] and *Hannibal* [1999, 2001]), Mizejewski claims that Starling's status as a "coveted commodity" produces a conundrum: even as stories featuring the woman detective have become staples of bookstores and best-seller lists and, increasingly, prime-time television series, her presence in commercial cinema—despite the box-office as well as critical success of *Silence of the Lambs* in particular—remains limited to "scarcely a handful" of films (2–3). According to Mizejewski, there is no "single answer or smoking gun" for this fact, but books are cheaper to produce than television shows and can therefore take greater risks in subject matter; television shows are cheaper than mainstream Hollywood movies and can more easily "accommodate audience responses"; and Hollywood movies are always "far steeper investment risks," more hidebound by formula than television shows, and less likely to take chances on a heroine who "isn't part of a straight couple or doesn't look likely to be" (10–11).

Not surprisingly, the term "female dick" recurs frequently throughout Mizejewski's study (as it does in most of the other scholarly work on the same subject) because it establishes the female detective as interfering in the site as well as sight of gender and sexuality. In contrast to the female victims, femmes fatales, and other "unnatural women" who populate the hard-boiled tradition of Hammett, Cain, Chandler, Spillane, and film noir, for example, the female dick is, like the stereotype of the lesbian in the same tradition, "the wrong body in the expected place" (12). The figure whose presence Mizejewski wants to trace is "not just a dame with a gun, but a licensed woman in a hardboiled tradition" (13). Clarice Starling, Dana Scully of "The X-Files," Kinsey Millhone of Sue Grafton's "alphabet series" of mysteries, or Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta (and Scarpetta's beautiful lesbian niece, Lucy) may not be "useful measures of social change, but they're good measures of social fantasy—in this case, fantasy about the place of women in high-level law enforcement, at the forensic autopsy or with a giant flashlight in the labyrinth" (16).

According to its jacket copy, *Hardboiled & High Heeled* is meant to be an "essential introduction" to the woman detective character; its theoretical goals overall are modest, its method predominantly descriptive within the broad parameters outlined above. Nevertheless, the theoretical approach to much of the discussion of popular culture gets a bit too perfunctory at times, at least if one takes the first chapter, "Watching the Women Detectives" (there is no introduction), as the place where such things are usually set up. The claims about genres and/as social fantasy are buttressed by several by-now familiar statements—"popular genres are gold mines for cultural studies because they tap into our fantasies and assumptions about gender, power, and sexuality" is a typical example (15). Nor is there a conclusion or summary chapter, which also makes the book seem more like a collection of essays than an introductory text (portions of the book have been published in three other venues). What the book is really concerned with is much more personal, namely what Mizejewski knows and loves about "the professional woman investigator" (she acknowledges that most of the characters she is interested in, despite the book's subtitle, are not, in fact, female detectives of the Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade variety). Mizejewski's fantasies about these women and their significance, her own "imaginary connection" to Clarice Starling, and her (the ambiguity of the pronoun is intentional here) "picturing" of herself in relation to an often hostile culture or professional environment are what drive the study.

After chapter one, which includes a useful section called "Dames to Dicks" that traces the history of the woman detective in popular culture and in professional law enforcement, the chapters of the book are focused on specific authors, characters, television shows, and films. Chapter two centers on two well-known, best-selling, hard-boiled women writers, Sue Grafton and Patricia Cornwell, and their investigative heroines. Mizejewski deals with both authors as media figures whose own unusually highly "pictured" celebrity images have, along with their fictional creations, engaged and provoked widespread fantasizing and discussion in their fan audiences. The next two chapters cover prime-time television shows, with chapter three running from the "Jiggle, Camp, and Couples" of the 1960s through the 1980s—beginning with "Honey West" (1965–66), "Police Woman" (1974–78), and "Charlie's Angels" (1976–81), and ending with "Moonlighting" (1985–89) and "Cagney and Lacey" (1982–88), to give only a partial list of the huge number of shows Mizejewski discusses, often unevenly (several pages for "Honey

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West," barely two paragraphs for *my* favorite, Emma Peel and "The Avengers" [1966–69]!). Chapter four focuses on the 1990s and includes discussion of the British "Prime Suspect" (1991–1996, although another set of episodes has been produced more recently) and "The X-Files" (1993–2002), among, again, many other shows. In both of these chapters, Mizejewski combines close textual analysis—of dialogue, narrative, mise-en-scène—with production and reception material to explore how the often uncomfortable position of the women investigators, both visually (in the television frame) and institutionally (in the professions in which they work) are "caught in the crosshairs but *also* [are] in a unique, powerful position to *see,* scrutinize, and probe" (112).

The remaining chapters are each about films. Chapter five begins with the 1951 B-movie *FBI Girl* and ranges from *Fatal Beauty* (1987) to *Black Widow* (1987) to Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel* (1990). The chapter ends with a rumination on the acknowledged disaster of *V.I. Warshawski* (1991, the title role played by Kathleen Turner), to date one of the few film adaptations of a women's hard-boiled detective novel. Mizejewski surmises that the failure of the film, which substantially watered down writer Sara Paretsky's "woman-centered politics" and interest in "inbred political and institutional corruption" (138), is significant precisely because of how the film version "transparently acted out" male sexual anxiety "with nervous penis jokes and the sexually powerful woman who is tamed and pushed into domesticity," and because its "banalities—the whorish red heels, the dick jokes, leg shots, retreats into romance—are a compendium of generic Hollywood pictures of powerful women" (140). Chapter six integrates the growing popularity of the female action heroine in the 1990s into a discussion of movies ranging from *Out of Sight* (1998, with Jennifer Lopez playing a federal agent) to the seriocomic *Fargo* (1996) and, ultimately, the nominally comic *Charlie's Angels* and *Miss Congeniality* (both 2000). Because of the popularity of the female action hero and her toned and trained female action *body,* the "films got slicker and the heroines sexier" (143). At the same time, while a film like *Fargo* respects its "exceptional" heroine's intelligence and courage, it is retrograde in its "placement of women on screen"; besides Marge (Frances McDormand), they belong to the usual clichés of hooker or homemaker (164). Mizejewski's final chapter, "Clarice and Her Fans: *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*," is by this point somewhat repetitive, but it provides a fine comparison and analysis of the gender politics of the two novels and films (with Jodie Foster and Julianne Moore, respectively) and their depictions of Clarice Starling. Finding that in the end there is "no comfortable outcome" for any woman detective as pictured or imagined in popular culture, Mizejewski concludes that it's "all right. These investigating women are almost always at odds with the job title, the traditional ending, and the usual romantic suspects" (197). But this is their strength, the source of the their appeal, the reason for their problematic fit with other generic conventions in television and Hollywood, and, conversely, their continuing and long-lived literary popularity and success.

One of the few problems I had with *Hardboiled & High Heeled* is that it often wants to claim certain issues as specific to the depiction of women detectives when they are in fact common to their male counterparts. For example, Mizejewski points out that the stories she is concerned with "always entail the minute details of what these women wear, eat, and window shop" (4), arguing that professional women are likely to identify with the "mixed bag of ambition, disappointments, successes, and carefully chosen accessories" that such stories describe (5). But one of the major points of Erin A. Smith's *Hard-Boiled* (Temple University Press, 2000), among other such studies, is that Chandler, Hammett, et al. produced work whose concern with class "is most powerfully apparent in its obsessive interest in clothing and interiors, those apparently trivial matters that are deeply enmeshed with the (re)production of class hierarchies" (105). A more nuanced discussion of the loneliness, isolation, and class and gender anxieties of many hard-boiled male detectives in relation to claims made about the woman detective would also have been useful, especially given Mizejewski's interests in *fantasy* as "a far more fluid and ambiguous model of how movies [and I presume television shows and books] and our responses to them might work" (7). Instead, Mizejewski focuses primarily on the *treatment* of women in hard-boiled literature and film noir. And finally, the detective in this reviewer continues to mull over the book's title and its terms (as well as a few other small mysteries), in what might be called *The Case of the Missing Hyphens.*

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Frey delineates four turbulent periods that mark Malle's career: the French New Wave, May '68, the 1970s, and finally 1978–95, when the director's American sojourn was

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Frey delineates four turbulent periods that mark Malle's career: the French New Wave, May '68, the 1970s, and finally 1978–95, when the director's American sojourn was

interrupted by returns to France for specific film projects. Frey properly situates Malle within the context of the New Wave, neither completely denying him New Wave status, nor simplifying his career by ignoring the traits that distinguish him from the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group of critic–filmmakers. According to Frey, one crucial distinguishing factor is Malle's upper-class status (he was a member of the Béghin sugar dynasty), which allowed him to establish a family production company (NEF) so that he could finance his own films rather than relying on outside producers. Frey fails to acknowledge, however, that this self-financing model was not unique to Malle; Claude Chabrol also followed this model until 1964. Godard also sprang from illustrious stock: the Monods. Malle's education at IDHEC and his 1956 Palme d'Or win with Jacques Cousteau for the documentary *Le Monde du silence* also distance him from the *Cahiers* group, but Frey emphasizes Malle's own statements as the strongest evidence for his lack of interest in the clique. Despite these complications, Frey highlights similarities between *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* and Godard's *A Bout de souffle* in order to emphasize Malle's influence on the budding film movement.

Although Malle's films are often described as eclectic in terms of their subject matter, Frey argues that a distinct aesthetic vision unifies the auteur's work. He characterizes the director as a classical realist who also integrates elements of Surrealism and documentary into his work. Although *Zazie dans le métro* and *Black Moon* are the most palpable instantiations of Surrealism, Frey argues that Surrealist irony is integrated throughout Malle's oeuvre. He also categorizes Malle's documentaries as travelogue journalism that adheres to tendencies of the *cinéma direct* movement. Finally, he situates Malle's productions within the tradition of quality and describes the camera's subordination to the plot and the privileged place of characters at the heart of Mallean reality.

Arguably the most intriguing aspect of the book is Frey's extended discussion of Malle's associations with members of the Hussard literary movement—an outgrowth of the royalist Action française movement in the 1950s—and the active pessimism in *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud, Les Amants,* and *Le Feu follet* as reflective of the Hussard mentality. The Hussards gained their name from Roger Nimier's 1950 novel *Le Hussard bleu* and included such right-leaning novelists as Antoine Blondin, Jacques Chardonne, Paul Morand, and, of course, Nimier. Although Frey explains that apart from their writing, the Hussards were notoriously inactive politically, he still paints the director as guilty by association in a section of the text that focuses more on others than on Malle himself. Frey details loose associations between the director and the novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline, an extreme anti-Semite, and also notes that Malle donated blood to Pierre Antoine Cousteau, the right-wing journalist brother of the oceanographer. Despite this slight overemphasis, Frey acknowledges the extreme complexity of Malle's politics and explains: "The ideological correspondence at play [between Malle and the Hussards] was more a matter of tone and subtle narrative implication than of any programmatic or didactic political commitment" (70). Strangely, Frey does not entertain the notion that Malle's association with the Hussards was another reason for his marginalization from the core of the French New Wave, a possibility that deserves consideration.

Frey shrewdly acknowledges that Malle's extremely complicated politics make pigeonholing the director impractical. For example, Malle always rejected Communism—one reason being that it was totalizing—and is often cited as refusing to sign petitions against the Algerian War in the early 1960s. However, Frey also highlights several actions Malle took surrounding May '68 as exemplary of his shift away from the Right. For example, as a jury member at Cannes, Malle facilitated the suspension of the festival in support of the social revolts in Paris. He also participated in the Langlois affair, and co-signed the Estates General of Cinema on May 26, 1968, which called for state-based studios that would allow filmmakers access to cameras, sound equipment, etc. During the same time period, Malle also advocated the continuation of the leftist journal *La Société des Réalisateurs* alongside Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Reading *Le Souffle au coeur* within this context, Frey considers it as Malle's filmic recuperation from his association with the Right because it is purposefully set in the 1950s, questions bourgeois social taboos, and relies on comedy rather than pessimism. Note also that Frey collectively conceives of *Le Souffle au coeur, Lacombe Lucien, Black Moon,* and *Pretty Baby*—four films from the 1970s period—as a synthesis and reworking of Malle's earlier material and "a sustained challenge to conventional thinking and conservatism" because of the way they confront bourgeois social mores (15).

Frey devotes the most attention, however, to *Au revoir les enfants,* Malle's most autobiographical film, in which the director depicts an episode in January 1944 when the Gestapo visited his boarding school in the country and raided his fifth-grade classroom. One of Malle's classmates was seized. Before leaving, the boy shook hands with each student and said goodbye. Malle often spoke of this event as haunting his memory, and the voiceover inscription that closes *Au revoir les enfants* certainly reiterates this idea. Frey discusses the film within a psychoanalytic context, treating the January 1944 incident as a primal scene, as well as invoking trauma theory and Freud's notion of the uncanny. Because Frey believes that Malle's "filmography has a strange propensity to rewrite its own meaning" (112), he calls for a re-reading of the director's earlier works in light of this late film. Frey discourages Malle scholars from merely reading the oeuvre chronologically, and he appropriately adheres to his own advice throughout the course of his book. Finally, one truly original contribution by Frey in his discussion of *Au revoir les enfants* should be noted: his interpretation of the film in relationship to the director's politics, particularly Malle's stance on authority and the arts.

Throughout *Louis Malle,* Frey refuses to simplify the countless complexities of Malle's career, for which he should be commended. The issues raised in Malle's films, as well as many of his political and ideological decisions, continue to perplex even the veteran Malle scholar. Frey honors the inescapable presence of ambiguity in Malle's work by consistently examining issues from multiple angles without provid-

ing a singular, closed synthesis of the material. Rather, he strives for openness, allowing the reader to come to his or her own conclusions. The polysemic readings of Malle that Frey provides will frustrate readers who desire finite answers, but to assign singular meanings to Malle would be reductive and academically unsound. Frey proves himself capable of addressing the many faces of Louis Malle that include—but are not limited to—playboy celebrity, *soixante-huitard, agent provocateur, militant de mémoire, chef d'orchestre,* and eclectic dilettante. Frey's nuanced readings of Malle's restless intelligence invite the reader to experience many moments of pleasurable contemplation.

ELIZABETH A. LATHROP earned her B.A. from The College of William and Mary and an M.A. in Film Studies from Emory University.

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Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich

By Mary-Elisabeth O'Brien. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004. $75.00. 294 pages.

"At the heart of my book," Mary-Elisabeth O'Brien concludes in her *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment,* "has been an effort to make the machine visible, to illustrate how the art of seduction practiced in movie theaters throughout the German Reich helped maintain the fascist state" (263). This final statement articulates both the work's major strength and its biggest weakness.

Looking at popular Nazi cinema as an instrumental part of the regime's overall propaganda machine is not a novel approach. In recent years, there have been various studies that seek to explore this cinema's relationship to Nazi ideology as well as to Weimar and Hollywood traditions—for instance, Eric Rentschler's *The Ministry of Illusion* (Harvard University Press, 1996) and Sabine Hake's *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (University of Texas Press, 2001). Indeed, Rentschler already argued that even though "'apolitical' films thrived, and long-standing popular legacies endured, allowing for a continuity of scripts and genres which would persist in postwar comedies, musicals, homeland films, and adaptations of novels and dramas" (9), we should keep in mind that they did not exist in political isolation, that in the Nazi state "politics and entertainment were inextricably bound" (21). In other words, even the inconsistencies one encounters in National Socialist films must be seen as productive contradictions that assured the public's acceptance of the fascist status quo. In contrast, Hake's study of popular cinema in the Third Reich calls for a normalization of German film history by looking at Third Reich film culture as allowing audiences to continue to "partake in the ongoing transformation of mass culture and modernity, including in an international context" (22).

Deeply indebted to Rentschler's approach, O'Brien's study concentrates on genre cinema and looks to formulate how the Nazis adapted existing generic patterns to their own political ends. The five chapters in this volume are devoted to different film genres prominent in Nazi popular film: the historical musical, the foreign adventure film, the home-front film, the melodrama, and the problem film. Each chapter in turn consists of several close readings of paradigmatic film texts. O'Brien mobilizes the notion of disenchantment, which Max Weber associated with modernity, to point to strategies of re-enchantment as a cultural practice by which Nazi propagandists sought to infuse ideology with magic and sentiment, thereby addressing spectators on the level of fantasy production. Of course, sentimentality and theatricality have long been regarded as the staples of Nazi aesthetics, and consequently the detailed readings of numerous genre films that make up the bulk of this volume are predictably similar to those advanced by other scholars who have explored the same territory. That said, O'Brien draws attention to film genres that have yet to be discussed by scholars in great detail and her analyses include significant primary research that effectively supports her arguments.

The historical musical, she reveals, can "transform political and economic discord into social harmony," thus restoring the status quo (261). O'Brien argues that a film like *Tanz auf dem Vulkan* (*Dancing on the Vulcano,* 1938), set in 1830s Paris, has a revolutionary and potentially subversive story, yet turns to a charismatic leader to facilitate a happy ending that celebrates communal bliss and emotional release, thereby suspending "the need for action or political change" (30). Similarly, the foreign adventure film uses exploration abroad "to re-establish the centrality of home and similitude" (261). Films such as *Kautschouk* (*Caoutchoc,* 1938), *Verklungene Melodie* (*Faded Melody,* 1938) and *Frauen für Golden Hill* (*Wives for Golden Hill,* 1938) are set in exotic foreign lands and momentarily suspend taboos against "homoerotic, interracial, and xenophilic desire" (105). Ultimately, however, they return to a celebration of homogeneity. The home-front film in turn shifts "remote international conflict" into the realm of the "family and communal entertainment" (261). By suggesting that entertainment as much as war unites the community, films like *Wunschkonzert* (*Request Concert,* 1940) and *Die grosse Liebe* (*True Love,* 1942) sublimate suffering through sentimental music. And finally, the melodrama demonstrates "the need for alternative lifestyles only to deny their validity later on"(262).

As feminist critics have often noted about melodramas in general, Nazi melodramas, according to O'Brien, place the erotic woman at the center of action, only to punish her by death (*Opfergang* [*Rite of Sacrifice*], 1943) or to reveal that her initial bad girl persona was merely a masquerade (*Damals* [*Back Then*], 1943). In the end, these films reestablish the patriarchal order and affirm conventional marriage. Only the problem film, O'Brien suggests, "would allow the well-crafted self-image of the National Socialist world to collapse," and thus it rarely reached the big screen (262). Arguably the most interesting genre addressed here, the problem film—with examples such as *Der verzauberte Tag* (*The Enchanted Day,* 1944) or *Via Mala* (*Street of Evil,* 1944)—features emotional,

ing a singular, closed synthesis of the material. Rather, he strives for openness, allowing the reader to come to his or her own conclusions. The polysemic readings of Malle that Frey provides will frustrate readers who desire finite answers, but to assign singular meanings to Malle would be reductive and academically unsound. Frey proves himself capable of addressing the many faces of Louis Malle that include—but are not limited to—playboy celebrity, *soixante-huitard, agent provocateur, militant de mémoire, chef d'orchestre,* and eclectic dilettante. Frey's nuanced readings of Malle's restless intelligence invite the reader to experience many moments of pleasurable contemplation.

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economic, or social difficulties so profound that even their "false" happy endings could not contain the potential for social critique they suggested. They were consequently banned from exhibition, a rare event in the state-controlled film industry in Nazi Germany.

Nazi Cinema as Enchantment thus generally adopts an interpretative model that identifies ideological strategies of containment in Nazi genre films, which first "allow" problematic discourses to be articulated, only to redress them later through "politically correct" resolutions in a National Socialist sense. As genre theorists like Thomas Elsaesser and others have pointed out, genre cinema repeatedly stages and solves contemporary conflicts that address social or political conditions undergoing historical change. In my view, what is problematic in O'Brien's analysis is not the way she shows how films made under National Socialism may have seduced German spectators, but the way she deals with the more ideologically inconsistent elements the films display. Do narrative resolutions really contain what went on before, or did these films provide alternative pleasures along with ideologically conformist messages? It is well known that Joseph Goebbels actively sought to manipulate viewers through the filmic medium, preferably without drawing attention to the films' ideological agenda.

The various films O'Brien discusses certainly contain material suitable for a National Socialist reading, and her detailed textual analyses of the films successfully demonstrate this potential. O'Brien leaves us dangling, however, with the question of whether this reception was the only one possible, particularly given the many ideological contradictions that generic concessions to popular tastes necessarily demanded —a point she readily admits. "However, for all its effort, the government could never be entirely successful at determining how the public received motion pictures," she concedes. "Indeed, it is often the ambiguities, the multivalent images, and the indeterminate narratives that make the films of lasting significance" (13). It is here where authors like Hake pick up the baton to explore how non-fascist traditions, from Weimar modernism to Hollywood models, informed the popular in Nazi Germany, and where O'Brien's analogy of the well-oiled propaganda machine becomes debatable.

O'Brien suggests in her conclusion that popular genre cinema assured audiences under National Socialism that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Along the same lines, this volume adopts conventional models of ideological analysis and effectively applies them to a number of little-discussed genre films well worth investigating in this growing field. While O'Brien does not often address other scholars' views of the films, her readings are generally insightful and draw on original research. Well written and jargon-free, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment* is a valuable contribution to the field of German cinema studies and adds significantly to the writing of Nazi film history.

ANTJE ASCHEID is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at the University of Georgia. She is the author of *Hitler's Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema* (Temple University Press, 2003).

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Nixon at the Movies

By Mark Feeney. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004. $27.50. 422 pages.

There is a danger, both for the author and for the reviewer, in calling a smart book "delightful." The author may seem a lightweight—what he gains in sales he sacrifices in respect—while the reviewer may seem to have been too easily compromised by pleasure. The reviewer, in other words, may seem to have unwittingly slipped into the position of Richard Nixon at the movies, at least as he is portrayed in Mark Feeney's unique, compelling, and, yes, delightful combination of biography and film criticism. *Nixon at the Movies* attempts to understand the trajectory of Nixon's life through the films he watched (especially the 530 films he viewed while President) and, simultaneously, to understand American film by using Nixon's needs and desires as the interpretive matrix.

In order to write this book, Feeney scrupulously studied the President's Daily Diary (kept by the Secret Service), *The Haldeman Diaries*, and the personal logs of the White House projectionist. He supplemented that material with extensive research into the media reports of Nixon's activities and the numerous memoirs of those surrounding him in order to present not only a chronological list of the hundreds of films Nixon viewed—usually with the exact date he viewed them—but also an ample supply of comments about his responses and reactions.

Organized into a loose, anecdotal chronology, starting with Nixon's childhood and early education, the book moves to his early political career, his tenure in the Senate, his defeats in 1960 and 1962, his attainment of the highest office, his fall from that office, and his post-mortem cinematic representations. The chapters, however, are not named after the episodes of Nixon's life but, rather, after the film most crucial to understanding each episode. The order of the films adheres to no particular chronology, just as Nixon's viewing of them was more or less random. To put it another way, Feeney organizes the book so as to attach the time lines of Nixon's life to the timelessness of American cinema's mythologies.

Nixon grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, but those tracks, Feeney makes clear, were called "Hollywood," and Nixon's identification with the movies was also his alienation from them, a fact that crucially differentiated him from Ronald Reagan. Regardless of where he was in the oscillations of his career and public esteem, Nixon never gained the respect that accrued to those with cinematic charisma or the camaraderie of people who had that charisma. Hence his difficulty in relating to Reagan, who was "genial and self-deprecating [as opposed to] Nixon: graceless and gratuitously blunt" (19). Nixon lacked Reagan's "actorliness" as much as he did Kennedy's leading-man looks and cinematic charm. In life, as at the movies, Nixon was painfully a spectator, a trait that associated him more closely with the millions of people who voted for him than with the select few who, like him, held high public office.

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No wonder Feeney sees Nixon as easily identified with the title character in *Mr. Roberts.* But "if Nixon is so like Roberts, and Roberts so like Fonda, then Nixon has to be like Fonda. Yet how can this be?" (93). Feeney's quandary about the problem of identifying Nixon with both Fonda and Fonda's signal role accurately suggests that *Nixon at the Movies* is an application of star theory. Fonda's star persona, exemplified by roles from Tom Joad and Wyatt Earp to the principled juror in *Twelve Angry Men,* the President in *Fail Safe,* or Mr. Roberts, was "an almost meta-physical epitome of the anti-Nixon" (53). And yet in his ordinariness and frustration at being marginalized, Nixon indeed mirrored Roberts. That uncomfortable association of Nixon, Roberts, and Fonda compels us to see the dark side of stardom as entailing a rejection of the audience, in that stars, by definition, force viewers to identify with everything they cannot be. One might even argue that Hollywood's success comes from its compulsively restaging this rejection. Thus *Mr. Roberts,* seen through Nixon's eyes, is a film about "boredom and despair" (93). The film character of Roberts, moreover, as Feeney makes clear, has a strong kinship to "Nixon's less congruent Second World War soul mate, George Patton. The sole demand both Patton and Roberts make of military service is the opportunity to fight" (94).

Although Nixon might have liked to understand himself in terms of actors such as Fonda, John Wayne, Gary Cooper, or James Stewart, his inability to imitate those stars who could valorize the loner marked him simply as lonely. Even though Nixon rose to the Vice Presidency from the Senate, for example, he never attained full social inclusion in America's most exclusive club. Since the film *Advise and Consent* made clear that the Senate itself was a star, the Senate became one more film hero, and thus for Nixon the focus of the insatiable longing associated with being a movie fan.

In this way, Nixon's closest cinematic double is Walter Neff, *Double Indemnity*'s hapless insurance salesman. Although "Neff is something all but impossible to imagine: Nixon with a sex drive . . . neither man would have much trouble recognizing himself in the other" (34). In large part this is due to the casting-against-type of Fred MacMurray, who is "Nixon as he might have been . . . a Nixon who had sold policies instead of argued cases" (33). By making the process of identifying as easy as it is undesirable, in other words, *Double Indemnity* complements those films in which the need to identify with the star exceeds the possibility of doing so.

Because the press was another elite club that evoked for Nixon the inextricable amalgam of longing and alienation endemic to movie-watching and star-gazing, *The Sweet Smell of Success* is the movie "Richard Nixon might have made had Richard Nixon been a movie director" (137). The film, Feeney brilliantly notes, bears "a nakedly Nixonian title, unleashing the poetry of his id without the prose of his superego" (143). The ruthless Walter Winchell-like gossip columnist at its center typified the journalists who defined the late 40s and 50s intersection of anti-Communism and entertainment. Although the film does not engage the politics of celebrity in terms of McCarthyism, it does put the return of the fan's repressed into a historical context. In this light, Nixon's launching of his career with his red-baiting defeat of former actress Helen Gahagan Douglas becomes a form of moviegoer's revenge.

In many ways, the longing created by cinematic identification suggested a rivalry for attention that typified Nixon's relationship with his closest advisors. Although, as Feeney convincingly argues, *Two Rode Together* was the informing cinematic text of Nixon's relationship with Henry Kissinger, the two were far more rivals than partners, with Nixon ostensibly the superior, but marked by Kissinger's flair for celebrity, so that "Kissinger, rather than being the cowboy star in a close-up . . . was the ultimate sidekick in a two-shot: Tonto to Nixon's Loneliest of Rangers" (172).

That Nixonian loneliness was also what connected Nixon to Capra heroes, for Capra, grounding "his political films in a very public worrying over what it means to be an American" (200), constructs a moral taxonomy of cynics and idealists. "Everyone in between gets banished—this despite the fact that it is, of course, in the in-between where democracy is most deeply rooted, where it best flourishes" (208). If *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is held together by James Stewart's ability to make of "an egregiously implausible character . . . through sheer force of sincerity, one of the landmark figures of American film" (209), it is because Stewart could do exactly what Nixon could not: forge from one's public isolation a sympathetic community. The naked visibility of Nixon's failure in this regard was one of the vivid Watergate motifs—one by one Nixon's allies and advisors morphed into liabilities, scapegoats, or traitors, leaving Nixon adrift with no Capra narrative (or Hawks narrative or Ford narrative) to redeem him. Understandably, Feeney cannot resist discussing *All the President's Men,* which lies somewhat outside the purview of his argument, like his consideration of the films in which Nixon himself is portrayed. Equally digressive, albeit hilarious, is Feeney's chapter devoted to Nixon's meeting with Elvis.

The book, nevertheless, holds together well, somehow making Nixon almost sympathetic despite the fact that Feeney has hardly one good word to say about him. To the extent that the book is a form of character assassination, it provides a brilliant gloss for (or is brilliantly glossed by) Niels Mueller's recent film, *The Assassination of Richard Nixon,* based on the true story of Sam Bicke, who was killed attempting to highjack an airplane in 1974 in order to fly it into the White House. For Bicke, a painfully alienated man, Nixon represented everything wrong with an American ethos that rewarded deception and vilified honesty. Culminating in the months just prior to Nixon's resignation, the film makes clear what Bicke was incapable of understanding—exactly how much he and Nixon had in common, how much Nixon epitomized not success but failure, not inclusion but isolation, not the acquisition of an American dream but proof of its impossibility.

If Feeney, like Mueller, has revealed something very telling about Nixon, he has also touched on a powerful aspect of American movies. The movies help explain why the very impossibility of liking Nixon makes it so difficult for us

to hate him, lest we be forced to recognize how much our love of the movies depends on the fact that we are sitting alone in the dark.

ALAN NADEL's books include *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America* and, most recently, *Television in Black-and-White America: Race and National Identity.*

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Off the Planet: Music, Sound and Science Fiction Cinema

Edited by Philip Hayward. Eastleigh, U.K.: John Libbey Publishing, 2004. $24.99. 214 pages.

In a recent episode of Seth Macfarlane's "American Dad!" CIA Agent Stan Smith recounts his first meeting with Roger, the alcohol-swilling alien that resides in the Smith family attic and sounds suspiciously likes 1960s comedian Paul Lynde. Earlier in the episode, Smith callously threw Roger in a dumpster after mistakenly believing that the alien had died. While Roger disguises himself as an elderly, stoop-shouldered matron and hides among a rest-home tour group, Smith recalls his initial search for Roger inside the notorious Area 51. Skulking alongside his fellow agents, Smith announces—"I'll check this lab where the theremin music is coming from," and discovers Roger hiding inside.

This gag from "American Dad!" offers a knowing acknowledgement of typical sci-fi conventions, but it would not be out of place in *Off the Planet,* a recent anthology examining the role of music and sound in science-fiction cinema. The collection, edited by Philip Hayward, consists of an introduction and eleven original essays examining the narrative motivations and expressive functions of music and sound in science-fiction cinema. Not surprisingly, several of these essays examine canonical Hollywood examples of the genre, such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Star Wars* (1977), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999), and the Terminator films. Beyond such familiar territory, however, *Off the Planet* also examines Japanese, Australian, and Canadian science-fiction films, and deals with cultish spoofs of the genre, such as Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and Sun Ra's *Space is the Place* (1974).

In many ways, *Off the Planet* is a latter-day companion to *Musique Fantastique,* Randall David Larson's 1985 monograph on music in science-fiction and fantasy films. Although Larson's book was aimed squarely at buffs rather than academics, it contained two important insights that provide a point of departure for the various authors included in *Off the Planet.* First of all, Larson argued that science-fiction and fantasy cinema has been vital to the aesthetic development of film music, and further, that many notable composers, such as Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams, did their finest and most challenging work in these genres—*Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Star Wars* (1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and *Alien* (1979). Secondly, Larson suggested that science fiction's characteristic emphasis on technological advancement, futuristic settings, and strange, otherworldly creatures provided an entry point for electronic music, twelve-tone serialism, *musique concrète,* and other strands of twentieth-century composition that were usually seen as being outside the stylistic purview of the classical Hollywood score.

Off the Planet accepts and adumbrates the foundational insights found in Larson's work, but the collection also explicitly and implicitly challenges several of its tacit assumptions. While *Musique Fantastique*'s survey of science-fiction and fantasy cinema maintains a strong aesthetic and auteurist bias, *Off the Planet* approaches the genre from a much broader theoretical perspective, one that draws extensively on the insights of musicology, film-genre theory, postmodernism, and critical race theory. Philip Hayward signals his anthology's distance from its predecessor in the very first sentence of his introduction, which describes a 1977 Clash performance that featured trombonist Rico Rodrigues' dub reggae recording of the *Star Wars* theme as part of its preshow entertainment. For Hayward, this moment not only provides an indication of *Star Wars*'—and by extension, science-fiction cinema's—pervasiveness within all forms of popular culture, but it also references the ability of marginalized groups to rework the triumphalist and culturally imperialist meanings of Hollywood science fiction narratives.

Not surprisingly, some of the strongest essays in the anthology are those which examine the ways in which science fiction's musical conventions are appropriated, parodied, or remapped to fit new narrative and cultural contexts. Nabeel Zuberi's piece, for example, contains a fascinating analysis of *Space is the Place* which locates the film's strange mix of jazz fusion, blaxploitation, and science fiction within the politics of black nationalism of the early 70s. Sun Ra's rarely seen film narrativizes the musician's Utopian cosmology by depicting an idyllic, extraterrestrial landscape that will some day serve as a colony for dissident African Americans transported there through a process of transmolecularization made possible through light and music. Lurking beneath Zuberi's analysis here is a larger historical question: if blacks had truly won equality during the civil rights movement, why would musicians like Sun Ra and George Clinton continue to employ Afro-futurist discourse to imagine an alternate universe that is defined in terms of Afro- and African-American social harmony?

Although they deal with much more familiar films than *Space is the Place,* both Hayward and Neil Lerner also make impressive contributions to *Off the Planet* through their analysis of the ideological implications of science-fiction film scores. Hayward offers a brief but compelling reading of Danny Elfman's score for *Mars Attacks!* in order to show that the film's music is structured in a way that aligns electronic and mechanical sounds with the invading aliens while the strange but human sound of Slim Whitman's voice becomes a literal weapon used against the invaders. For Hayward, the ululations of Whitman's yodeling become a formal and narrative analog to the weird vibratos of the theremin, a sound that has itself become a science-fiction cliché. Lerner, on the

to hate him, lest we be forced to recognize how much our love of the movies depends on the fact that we are sitting alone in the dark.

ALAN NADEL's books include *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America* and, most recently, *Television in Black-and-White America: Race and National Identity.*

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Off the Planet: Music, Sound and Science Fiction Cinema

Edited by Philip Hayward. Eastleigh, U.K.: John Libbey Publishing, 2004. $24.99. 214 pages.

In a recent episode of Seth Macfarlane's "American Dad!" CIA Agent Stan Smith recounts his first meeting with Roger, the alcohol-swilling alien that resides in the Smith family attic and sounds suspiciously likes 1960s comedian Paul Lynde. Earlier in the episode, Smith callously threw Roger in a dumpster after mistakenly believing that the alien had died. While Roger disguises himself as an elderly, stoop-shouldered matron and hides among a rest-home tour group, Smith recalls his initial search for Roger inside the notorious Area 51. Skulking alongside his fellow agents, Smith announces—"I'll check this lab where the theremin music is coming from," and discovers Roger hiding inside.

This gag from "American Dad!" offers a knowing acknowledgement of typical sci-fi conventions, but it would not be out of place in *Off the Planet,* a recent anthology examining the role of music and sound in science-fiction cinema. The collection, edited by Philip Hayward, consists of an introduction and eleven original essays examining the narrative motivations and expressive functions of music and sound in science-fiction cinema. Not surprisingly, several of these essays examine canonical Hollywood examples of the genre, such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Star Wars* (1977), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999), and the Terminator films. Beyond such familiar territory, however, *Off the Planet* also examines Japanese, Australian, and Canadian science-fiction films, and deals with cultish spoofs of the genre, such as Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and Sun Ra's *Space is the Place* (1974).

In many ways, *Off the Planet* is a latter-day companion to *Musique Fantastique,* Randall David Larson's 1985 monograph on music in science-fiction and fantasy films. Although Larson's book was aimed squarely at buffs rather than academics, it contained two important insights that provide a point of departure for the various authors included in *Off the Planet.* First of all, Larson argued that science-fiction and fantasy cinema has been vital to the aesthetic development of film music, and further, that many notable composers, such as Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams, did their finest and most challenging work in these genres—*Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Star Wars* (1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and *Alien* (1979). Secondly, Larson suggested that science fiction's characteristic emphasis on technological advancement, futuristic settings, and strange, otherworldly creatures provided an entry point for electronic music, twelve-tone serialism, *musique concrète,* and other strands of twentieth-century composition that were usually seen as being outside the stylistic purview of the classical Hollywood score.

Off the Planet accepts and adumbrates the foundational insights found in Larson's work, but the collection also explicitly and implicitly challenges several of its tacit assumptions. While *Musique Fantastique*'s survey of science-fiction and fantasy cinema maintains a strong aesthetic and auteurist bias, *Off the Planet* approaches the genre from a much broader theoretical perspective, one that draws extensively on the insights of musicology, film-genre theory, postmodernism, and critical race theory. Philip Hayward signals his anthology's distance from its predecessor in the very first sentence of his introduction, which describes a 1977 Clash performance that featured trombonist Rico Rodrigues' dub reggae recording of the *Star Wars* theme as part of its preshow entertainment. For Hayward, this moment not only provides an indication of *Star Wars*'—and by extension, science-fiction cinema's—pervasiveness within all forms of popular culture, but it also references the ability of marginalized groups to rework the triumphalist and culturally imperialist meanings of Hollywood science fiction narratives.

Not surprisingly, some of the strongest essays in the anthology are those which examine the ways in which science fiction's musical conventions are appropriated, parodied, or remapped to fit new narrative and cultural contexts. Nabeel Zuberi's piece, for example, contains a fascinating analysis of *Space is the Place* which locates the film's strange mix of jazz fusion, blaxploitation, and science fiction within the politics of black nationalism of the early 70s. Sun Ra's rarely seen film narrativizes the musician's Utopian cosmology by depicting an idyllic, extraterrestrial landscape that will some day serve as a colony for dissident African Americans transported there through a process of transmolecularization made possible through light and music. Lurking beneath Zuberi's analysis here is a larger historical question: if blacks had truly won equality during the civil rights movement, why would musicians like Sun Ra and George Clinton continue to employ Afro-futurist discourse to imagine an alternate universe that is defined in terms of Afro- and African-American social harmony?

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other hand, deals with the symphonic science-fiction scores of John Williams for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Both of these scores have received close musicological analysis in the literature on science-fiction film scores, but Lerner argues that this formalist approach overlooks the ideological implications of the music's apparent endorsement of masculinist and imperialist discourses.

On the negative side, while all of the textual analyses featured in *Off the Planet* are generally first rate, some essays in the anthology fail to fully engage larger questions about the genre's treatment of otherness, technology, and dystopia. In these instances, the authors are content to demonstrate only the functions and significance of a particular film's sound and music. While I have no desire to gainsay the contributions that criticism can make to film-music studies as a still-evolving field, I also cannot help but wish that the authors had aimed for a slightly higher goal. At this point in the discipline's development, it seems almost tautological to suggest that music plays an important role in the narrational strategies of a particular film. Consequently, if film-music studies are going to advance in new and exciting directions, a critical analysis of a film score should not only tell us how the music functions within its narrative context, but also how the author's exegesis contributes to the larger development of the discipline as a whole.

On the whole, however, *Off the Planet* makes a vital contribution to the growing literature on both film music and science-fiction cinema. To judge a book by its cover, one might assume that *Off the Planet* is aimed at the buffs and fan boys who populate "Star Trek" and "The X-Files" conventions. But do not be fooled by this cover's comic-book rendering of a guitar-playing robot and a Medusa-haired alien chanteuse. Beneath its flamboyant exterior, *Off the Planet* features a series of insightful, smartly written analyses of the aesthetic and cultural significance of science-fiction soundscapes.

JEFF SMITH is the author of *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music,* and the director of the Program in Film and Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

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Policing the Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America

By Lee Grieveson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
$60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 348 pages.

This is now the definitive study of its subject, which, despite the subtitle, is confined to the period between 1907 and 1915, during which emerged not only the durable stylistic conventions of classic Hollywood film but also cinema's social function and the methods devised to police it. Chronological narrowness allows the author to bring intense focus to bear on the work, which is grounded in prodigious primary research and framed by extremely wide secondary and theoretical reading (his endnotes stretch from p. 218 to p. 315). Grieveson seems to have read virtually everything pertaining not just to cinema history and cultural theory but also to American social and political history at the turn of the twentieth century (I can think of only a few relevant works he has ignored—Gaines Foster's *Moral Reconstruction* [2002], for example, and Gary Gerstle's *American Crucible* [2001]). The fruit of this great labor is not, for the most part, new information about the rise of movie censorship, but new comprehension of the complex linkages among a diverse range of topics that many of us had grasped separately before. In the end, the author earns the right to issue his slightly overstated conclusion that the "fundamental shape and function of cinema" (215) were established during this period.

Grieveson's clear introduction, five meaty chapters, and substantive conclusion address central questions in movie history. In chapter one he asks why certain elites were anxious about the cinema and why they chose certain strategies to regulate it, which leads to a richly elaborated discussion of "the context of an ongoing process of cultural contestation" (13) among reformers (especially women), entrepreneurs, and the expanding agencies of the state. Here, among other things, he is very smart about the "complex amalgam of social control and self-definition" (22) that marked middle-class reform discourse and practice. Next he turns to Chicago in 1906–7, when "scandalous cinema" (most notoriously, portrayal of the Thaw-White murder and sex scandal) led to the first municipal censorship law in the U.S. Again rich and multilayered, the discussion clarifies the "shift from a literal policing of the cinema . . . to a metaphoric policing" that can be observed at the very earliest moments of this history and which is one of the author's central themes. Characteristically, even as he makes strong claims, Grieveson qualifies his judgments. Thus, though emphasizing the shift to the "internalization" of policing, the author acknowledges that the stick—"the threat of state intervention"—was "never far from the surface" (77).

In his third chapter, the author turns to New York City, 1907–9, and the creation of the National Board of Censorship, which, despite its name, sought to avoid governmental control in favor of elite collaboration with producers in the task of film betterment. Grieveson moves masterfully among themes, including nineteenth-century temperance melodrama, the problem of "deviant masculinity," the crucial tension between reformers' educative and repressive tendencies, and the equally important tensions between maternalist moral authority and patriarchal gaze. Along the way, the author gives useful attention to pioneer distributor George Kleine (whose papers in the Library of Congress seem to be one of the few relevant archival sources the author did not consult, but which deserve attention). Kleine's efforts to promote educational film exposed the industry's difficulty in asserting cinema's claim to represent reality, and thus to deserve First Amendment protection, while simultaneously trying to deflect critics by insisting that movies were harmless entertainment.

In "Film Fights, 1910–1912," Grieveson takes on the well-researched subject of Jack Johnson, scoring points especially in his insistence on the significance of the Sims Act (1912) in

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auguring the future of movie censorship. No one has made this point more strongly, and in doing so Grieveson powerfully demonstrates the crucial influence of movie controversies on the development of racial nationalism and on broader tendencies toward centralized moral policing in modern America. In his fifth chapter, the author skillfully interweaves legal history and the controversies over "sex-problem photoplays" from 1913 to 1914. His conclusion brings all his themes to bear on the *Mutual* decision of 1915, which defined movies as mere commerce and thus unworthy of First Amendment protection, a ruling that stood until 1952. Without sounding deterministic, Grieveson's argument gathers all the strands of his narrative, analysis, and interpretation into a final argument that seems inevitable in its conclusions. Movies would have nothing to do with politics—or reality—and politics would have nothing to do with movies. Hollywood products would amuse, even shock or titillate, as far as allowed. But, while clever cognoscenti might occasionally parse mainstream movies for political subtexts, other conceptions of film—as propaganda, as documentary, as porn, as avant-garde, among others—were marginalized.

In insisting that what was foreclosed by 1915 could "never again" (36; and also 213–15) truly be opened, I think the author overstates the case. Work on cinema in the early 1930s and the 1960s suggests that, as Grieveson himself sometimes allows, almost nothing is ever final in the realm of culture. In the 1930s gangster cycle, as Jonathan Munby has argued in *Public Enemies, Public Heroes* (1999), the sheer noise of ethnic voices, not to mention of guns, could break through the silence that was imperfectly internalized and in need of renewed repression. After the stick of censorship lifted with the *Miracle* decision in 1952, internalization could not prevent the slide toward disorder—in industry structure, in narrative and visual conventions, in broader moral understandings—and the reopening of most of the questions temporarily foreclosed in 1915.

Whatever one may think about these observations, all film scholars—as well as historians of women, the progressive era, racial ideology, and modern nationalism—are in Grieveson's debt. His prose is clean, even when grappling with dense evidence and denser theory; the 30 illustrations are well chosen and well integrated into the text. This is a book that should be accessible to non-specialists.

FRANCIS G. COUVARES is E. Dwight Salmon Professor of History and American Studies at Amherst College and is at work on a social history of free speech and censorship in America.

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Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television

By Derek Kompare. New York: Routledge, 2005. $85.00 cloth; $23.95 paper. 243 pages.

Derek Kompare's *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television,* an industrial and cultural history of reruns on American television, fills a longstanding gap in television studies. Although reruns constitute much of our television experience, there has been remarkably little sustained academic interest in them. Instead, historical studies of television have largely concentrated on first-run television programming or television's capacity for liveness and simultaneity. In this compelling contribution to the field, Kompare argues that repetition, rather than liveness or presentness, is the "primary structuring factor of commercial television in the United States" (xi). Television, in Kompare's view, is more like a time machine that offers a mélange of past and present than an ideal medium for live, contemporary events.

Kompare begins with the relatively simple question: why reruns? Throughout the course of the book, he sustains a complex account of how reruns have not only developed as a business practice in the television industry but have also shaped the experience of television as well as the understanding of the nation's past. Drawing primarily on the television industry trade journal *Broadcasting* and to a lesser degree on corporate and legal records, Kompare traces the development and exploitation of repetition on television from the three-network oligopoly era of the late 1940s to the current moment of convergence and conglomeration.

Although reruns began to appear on American television in the 1950s, Kompare's chronological study begins 150 years prior to the advent of television. He traces the impulse for repeated forms of popular culture back to the industrialization of print and audiovisual media and the attendant economic, legal, and industrial practices such as statutory copyright protection, royalties, and new modes of production that developed to circulate mass culture in the subsequent century. Kompare argues that "a dominant economic, legal, and cultural logic that determined the production and reproduction of culture" (xv) developed between the 1790s and the 1920s around the publishing, film, and music industries which enabled popular culture to be mass produced, distributed, and consumed in standardized forms. Kompare argues that this "regime of repetition" (3) made possible the culture and industry of television reruns. The remaining chapters set out a well-researched account of how repetition functions as an underlying logic of the television industry and trace the importance of the rerun in relation to new technologies and new configurations within the broadcast and cable television industries, as well as in relation to the formation of national memory.

One of the strengths of the book is Kompare's demonstration of the remarkable centrality, flexibility, and duration of the rerun—and repetition more generally—in terms of fulfilling the shifting institutional logics of the broadcast and cable television industries. Through an examination of industrial discourses, Kompare shows that early in its inception, the rerun became an ideal commodity for television because it was a relatively inexpensive, stable, and safe form: viewers reliably tuned in to familiar television reruns that were much cheaper than original programming. The stability of the off-network rerun, Kompare argues, was central to the expansion of independent UHF stations in the 1960s because reruns offered the prestige of network television and thereby

auguring the future of movie censorship. No one has made this point more strongly, and in doing so Grieveson powerfully demonstrates the crucial influence of movie controversies on the development of racial nationalism and on broader tendencies toward centralized moral policing in modern America. In his fifth chapter, the author skillfully interweaves legal history and the controversies over "sex-problem photoplays" from 1913 to 1914. His conclusion brings all his themes to bear on the *Mutual* decision of 1915, which defined movies as mere commerce and thus unworthy of First Amendment protection, a ruling that stood until 1952. Without sounding deterministic, Grieveson's argument gathers all the strands of his narrative, analysis, and interpretation into a final argument that seems inevitable in its conclusions. Movies would have nothing to do with politics—or reality—and politics would have nothing to do with movies. Hollywood products would amuse, even shock or titillate, as far as allowed. But, while clever cognoscenti might occasionally parse mainstream movies for political subtexts, other conceptions of film—as propaganda, as documentary, as porn, as avant-garde, among others—were marginalized.

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helped fledgling stations build audiences. Repetition was also central to the expansion of the cable industry from the 1970s to the 1990s, as reruns were desperately needed not only to fill up the void of the ever-expanding multichannel universe, but also because they allowed cable networks to brand themselves and narrowcast to desirable demographics with the repetition of key texts. In the 2000s, the logic of repetition has figured centrally in the exploitation of the ancillary DVD market as conglomerates release boxed sets of classic television shows that feed a new market of what Kompare calls "acquisitive repetition." However, Kompare's reading of the centrality of reruns on television during the past years is not reduced to simple financial logic; he rather understands syndication as a cultural practice that produces certain sensibilities and ideologies, thus providing a fuller account of the history of syndication.

One important sensibility produced by these shifts in the industrial and cultural practice of repetition is historicity, or what Kompare refers to as the production of "the television heritage" (102) in the 1970s, which was enabled by the circulation of reruns on television from the preceding two decades. The television heritage, Kompare argues, is made up of academic studies of television, museums dedicated to the preservation and circulation of classic television, journalistic coverage of television, and fan cultures based on television reruns. The television heritage was initiated by industry economics that exploited reruns as an inexpensive form of programming, but in effect validated television, which became, as Kompare argues, "the effectual Rosetta Stone of post-World War II America" (106). *Rerun Nation* demonstrates how, beginning in the 1970s, reruns satisfied a cultural desire to gaze backwards at the past, and how the television industry symbiotically exploited that backward glance in order to validate and profit from its business strategies of repetition. While the understanding of television as a Rosetta Stone may seem overdramatic to some, Kompare's account of the television heritage presents a compelling model of the television experience as one that joins the past and the present and cannot be separated from a collective understanding of the past. Rather than simply examining how the history of syndication affected business practices, Kompare astutely demonstrates the cultural stakes of ubiquitous television reruns.

Many studies of the relationship between media and memory are theoretical in nature or are based on the textual analysis of television series that represent the past. Kompare's book, however, is unusual in that it also focuses on the material industrial practices of and discourses about recycling the past and how they intersect with the production of national memory. That said, it is notable that the book does not include a textual analysis of actual rerun texts. A discussion of the shift in meaning when reruns of "I Love Lucy" are recontextualized with new commercials and interstitial material on TV-Land, or when reruns of HBO's "Sex and the City" are edited for content when syndicated on basic cable, could have added another dimension to the regime of repetition. However, as Kompare explains in his introduction, he does not include textual analyses of reruns or the material that frames them in part because of the ephemeral nature of broadcast television, but also because he is interested in writing not so much a history of syndication based on the "finished text" of the television rerun as a history based on accounts of industrial discourses and practices. Kompare's approach succeeds in providing a thorough and engaging history of syndication, and also in demonstrating how these issues are always inherently linked to larger issues of cultural production.

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Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux

By J. Ronald Green. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. $29.95. 295 pages.

With a Crooked Stick: The Films of Oscar Micheaux

By J. Ronald Green. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 314 pages.

Writing about pioneer African-American novelist and independent filmmaker Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951) is no easy task. First, there is the problem of his artistic style, which can seem amateurish at best, shoddy at worst. Second, there is the problem of his politics, which might appear to be conservative and disdainful of African Americans who fail to disprove racist stereotypes about black incompetence and immorality. Third, there is the problem of ascertaining Micheaux's artistic and/or political intentions. Many of the facts about Micheaux must be gleaned from his fictionalizations of his life story. The majority of his films has not survived, and of those that have, many are incomplete (often due to invasive censorship), which problematizes generalizations we might want to make about his aesthetic aims and social goals.

The difficult question of Micheaux's intentions—as an artist and as a political commentator—is the central if inconsistently acknowledged one that J. Ronald Green seeks to answer in his companion volumes, *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* and *With a Crooked Stick: The Films of Oscar Micheaux*. In these studies, Green displays his deep engagement with Micheaux's creative work, building upon his previously published articles assessing Micheaux's films and the growing body of Micheaux criticism. Green has earned a central place in the cadre of "race film" scholars turning out groundbreaking scholarship on this overlooked chapter of American film history. Other studies have sliced off smaller portions of Micheaux's complex legacy for analysis, including Betti Van-Epps-Taylor's biography *Oscar Micheaux . . . Dakota Homesteader, Author, Pioneer Film Maker,* and two treatments of his silent films: Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence's *Writing Himself into History,* and the landmark collection *Oscar Micheaux and his Circle,* edited by Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser. However, Green addresses Micheaux's life story and his complete works, from his first novel, *The Conquest* (1913), to his final film, *The Betrayal* (1951), with

helped fledgling stations build audiences. Repetition was also central to the expansion of the cable industry from the 1970s to the 1990s, as reruns were desperately needed not only to fill up the void of the ever-expanding multichannel universe, but also because they allowed cable networks to brand themselves and narrowcast to desirable demographics with the repetition of key texts. In the 2000s, the logic of repetition has figured centrally in the exploitation of the ancillary DVD market as conglomerates release boxed sets of classic television shows that feed a new market of what Kompare calls "acquisitive repetition." However, Kompare's reading of the centrality of reruns on television during the past years is not reduced to simple financial logic; he rather understands syndication as a cultural practice that produces certain sensibilities and ideologies, thus providing a fuller account of the history of syndication.

One important sensibility produced by these shifts in the industrial and cultural practice of repetition is historicity, or what Kompare refers to as the production of "the television heritage" (102) in the 1970s, which was enabled by the circulation of reruns on television from the preceding two decades. The television heritage, Kompare argues, is made up of academic studies of television, museums dedicated to the preservation and circulation of classic television, journalistic coverage of television, and fan cultures based on television reruns. The television heritage was initiated by industry economics that exploited reruns as an inexpensive form of programming, but in effect validated television, which became, as Kompare argues, "the effectual Rosetta Stone of post-World War II America" (106). *Rerun Nation* demonstrates how, beginning in the 1970s, reruns satisfied a cultural desire to gaze backwards at the past, and how the television industry symbiotically exploited that backward glance in order to validate and profit from its business strategies of repetition. While the understanding of television as a Rosetta Stone may seem overdramatic to some, Kompare's account of the television heritage presents a compelling model of the television experience as one that joins the past and the present and cannot be separated from a collective understanding of the past. Rather than simply examining how the history of syndication affected business practices, Kompare astutely demonstrates the cultural stakes of ubiquitous television reruns.

Many studies of the relationship between media and memory are theoretical in nature or are based on the textual analysis of television series that represent the past. Kompare's book, however, is unusual in that it also focuses on the material industrial practices of and discourses about recycling the past and how they intersect with the production of national memory. That said, it is notable that the book does not include a textual analysis of actual rerun texts. A discussion of the shift in meaning when reruns of "I Love Lucy" are recontextualized with new commercials and interstitial material on TV-Land, or when reruns of HBO's "Sex and the City" are edited for content when syndicated on basic cable, could have added another dimension to the regime of repetition. However, as Kompare explains in his introduction, he does not include textual analyses of reruns or the material that frames them in part because of the ephemeral nature of broadcast television, but also because he is interested in writing not so much a history of syndication based on the "finished text" of the television rerun as a history based on accounts of industrial discourses and practices. Kompare's approach succeeds in providing a thorough and engaging history of syndication, and also in demonstrating how these issues are always inherently linked to larger issues of cultural production.

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particular emphasis on his fifteen extant films. Given this ambitious scope, Green takes the space of two book-length studies first to outline Micheaux's guiding philosophical principles, particularly his understanding of the relationship between race and class (*Straight Lick*), and then to illustrate how these principles manifest themselves in the existing works (*Crooked Stick*).

Though Micheaux always struggled for money and recognition, Green introduces him as "one of the most original and successful filmmakers of all time" (*Straight Lick,* xi). Both books recognize the many contradictions in Micheaux's beliefs, business practices, and films (at the levels of content and style), and frequently acknowledge that Micheaux's authorial intentions can be difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, they attempt to construct Micheaux as a thoroughly self-possessed, rational, and therefore admirable, auteur. The books maintain that Micheaux had an "overriding goal of class advancement" and created "a coherent, successful middle-class film style to accomplish his goal" which was consistent and true to his political vision and social circumstances (*Crooked Stick,* 1).

Green's unabashed admiration for Micheaux's outspokenness and productivity (seven novels; around 40 films) in the face of overwhelming restrictions is reflected in the black folk expression he adapts for the books' titles: striking "a straight lick with a crooked stick." Micheaux had to wield a "crooked stick," or use unorthodox, improvisational strategies, because he was an undercapitalized independent filmmaker and a black man bound by racist restrictions on his resources and opportunities for public commentary. But while Micheaux had to develop oblique business and representational strategies (to raise capital outside of the Hollywood studio system; to get his "controversial" racial themes past local—predominantly white—censor boards), he still managed to deliver a "straight lick," or unwavering critique of the individuals and institutions he saw as blocking African-American progress.

The phrase is an apt one, foregrounding the multiple layers of signification in Micheaux's work. He spoke his sense of truth to power, subverting the authority of white gatekeepers as well as black elites and cultural critics in his efforts to reach a mass black audience. Micheaux also criticized large portions of that audience, castigating urban decadence, Southern ignorance, "fast" entertainment culture, and duplicitous black ministers (while still trying to solicit their patronage). The term "straight lick with a crooked stick" nicely frames Green's attempt to elevate Micheaux above the superficial criticisms he has faced from the 1910s to the present day by giving his work the properly calibrated close readings they deserve. But Green's effort to cement Micheaux's "incorrigible and undaunted" oppositional status (*Crooked Stick,* 38) tends to generate rather rigid binary formulations, imposing structures of evaluation onto Micheaux's works that are at once too orderly to account for Micheaux's relentless ambiguities and too loose to make a firm case about how Micheaux wanted his films to look, to sound, and to be interpreted.

For example, the first chapter of *Straight Lick* consists of an extended discussion of "Micheaux vs. Griffith" as diametrically opposed auteurs. Pitting them against each other, Green seeks to bring Micheaux into meaningful critical comparison with the much-celebrated "father" of film narrative and American cinema. What Green is also doing is challenging persistent criticisms of Micheaux's "bourgeois" sensibilities (for instance, his seeming celebration of professional success, property ownership, vaulted speech) by framing Griffith as "elite," and thereby opening up an reverse role for Micheaux: that of a "middle-class" artist. Green explains that the term "bourgeois" should not be applied to Micheaux because it derives from elitist class aspirations and sensibilities that were not viable for or attractive to a black man of his humble origins and means. Instead, the more generic (if vague) term "middle class" better captures Micheaux's outlook and his aesthetic. According to Green, Griffith helped to establish "classical" film style by adopting "upper-class cinematic values, such as expensiveness, that were incongruous and inappropriate to the lower- and middle-class audience he aimed at and reached" (*Straight Lick,* xv). Micheaux's filmmaking, in contrast, has more "integrity" (*Straight Lick,* xv) because his class position was always materially and ideologically analogous to that of his struggling black audiences, resulting in more realistic content (the efforts of everyday people) and a style that, if "rough" in Griffithian (and, by extension, Hollywood) terms, mirrored this common (man) terrain.

Green's comparison expands the claims other scholars have made about how Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920) "answers" Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by moving beyond the politics of representation to the politics shaping production. But the laundry list Green enumerates to spell out their differences (e.g., "spectacle" vs. "documentation"; "aggrandizement" vs. "uplift"; "purity" vs. "hybridity"; "oneness" vs. "twoness" [5]) not only conflates stylistic qualities with political views, but also precludes any overlap between Micheaux's and Griffith's practices (for example, what shared qualities might make them both attract black audiences: Griffith's pre- and post-*Birth* films played in black neighborhood theaters).

Nor does the list imagine potential instabilities within the terms it uses. For example, Green describes "Hollywood professionalism" as defined by "larger-than-life spectacle," eliding generic and production budget differences that might not make a Hollywood-produced serial or B-Western as "grand" and "glossy" as a big-budget epic or musical. As a result, Green frequently frames Micheaux's "oppositional" filmmaking as correspondingly consistent, despite the fact that his close readings repeatedly demonstrate that Micheaux had multiple, and conflicting, responses to the dominant cinema, and even "aimed at the higher financing that uplift required" (*Straight Lick,* 96). Green's textual analyses maintain that Micheaux never simply imitated dominant white commercial filmmaking. A more nuanced presentation of the dominant film industry would have strengthened Green's descriptions of how Micheaux sought to "answer" and subvert Griffith's films (and then Hollywood's), to signify on them, and to compete financially with their many forms, styles, and appeals.

Green does not provide specifics about the production contexts and budgets of Micheaux and his competitors, nor does he look at Micheaux's popular and critical reception, as Bowser and Spence do so effectively in *Writing Himself into History*. Instead, he addresses some of these issues in footnotes and appendices because, as he establishes at the outset of *Straight Lick,* his investigation is a "thematic, textual, and contextual analysis and critical assessment of [Micheaux's] accomplishment in the art of cinema" (xi). Some of the most successful chapters interrogate the complex roles of "stereotype" and "caricature" in Micheaux's stylistic approaches to black subjects. In *Straight Lick,* Green considers the many ways in which Micheaux juxtaposes figures representing "uplift" with those representing the amusing "show" of black degradation by carefully considering his logics of parallel editing (in *The Exile,* 1931) and figure blocking (in *The Darktown Revue,* 1931). Green also effectively describes how Micheaux performed an extended, multitextual critique of black performativity, drawing analogies between buffoonish professional entertainers and average black folks who engage in everyday confirmations of white stereotypes (as seen in *Murder in Harlem/Lem Hawkins' Confession,* 1935).

Here and elsewhere, Green takes the bull by the horns to demonstrate that Micheaux was self-conscious not only about black stereotypes, but also about skin-color politics, white financing, the efficacy of capitalism, and the idea of a black middle class. His reading of Micheaux's passing drama, *God's Stepchildren,* in *Crooked Stick,* tackles one of Micheaux's most artistically and politically "difficult" texts: "Its acting is stilted and declamatory; its shooting is laced with technical and narrative mistakes; and it contains some of the nastiest 'racial' slurs and some of the meanest streaks in main characters in all of Micheaux's work. For viewers inclined to dislike Micheaux's style, disagree with his ideology, or distrust his loyalty and character, this film might cinch the case" (205). Though the chapter proceeds in the rather stiff template the author uses for all fifteen films discussed in the book (plot summary, then discussions of class positioning, "uplift," class comparison, and the interplay of race and class), Green offers a patient stylistic analysis, revealing how Micheaux uses dialogue and casting, as well as a dynamic interplay of looking relations involving the passing "bad girl" Naomi (presented in two-shots, close-ups, and eyeline matches [208–12]), to critique the threat and appeals of whiteness.

Although Green admirably takes his time with the thorniest of critical questions, many of his readings feel belabored precisely because he puts so much faith in—and pressure on—the films to explain themselves. Throughout both books, Green comes across as a zealous defense attorney, anticipating and deflecting any and all charges against his client with readings that confirm Micheaux's righteousness. In *Straight Lick,* he engages in a lengthy, point-for-point refutation of Thomas Cripps' dismissal of Micheaux's cinematic style in the seminal *Slow Fade to Black,* and spends a chapter countering Joseph Young's castigation of Micheaux's putative racial self-hatred in *Black Novelist as White Racist.* Too often, Green's observations about Micheaux's intentions are caught up in a chicken-and-egg argument that gleans his values and aims from close readings of the films, and in turn validates the films because they are "true" to those values and aims.

Since Green's close readings are often not evidence enough to explicate the network of relationships (with actors, financiers, audiences, critics, censors) that informed Micheaux's intended style and meanings, these books might best be read as explorations of the frameworks Micheaux created for himself to make sense of the racist personal, professional, and representational restrictions he and the black community faced. We can see this in the biographical chapter in *Crooked Stick,* which features a fantastic and long-overdue discussion of Micheaux's novels *The Case of Mrs. Wingate* (1945) and *The Story of Dorothy Stanfield* (1946), written toward the end of his career. Here Micheaux uses autobiographical surrogates to reflect on some of his artistic and business struggles and philosophies. For example, Green cites a passage in *Wingate* in which noble black filmmaker Sidney Wyeth explains that he does not mislead his actresses into believing race-film roles will lead to Hollywood stardom because his films are modest, intra-racial productions, and because Wyeth would not make such a claim to exploit black women economically or sexually. This passage offers a helpful ethical explanation of the economic and political claims Green makes in the first book about Micheaux's principled "resistance to the star system" as a Hollywood construct that the race film industry "could not afford" (*Crooked Stick,* 32–33; *Straight Lick*,118–19). Green's method of using Micheaux to explain himself may not reliably evince Micheaux's artistic intentions or prove his success, but it does offer fascinating glimpses into Micheaux's evaluation of himself (particularly over time), and the structures he tried to put in place to chart his own merits and progress.

Green's most innovative contribution is his tailored discussion of class (explicated in both introductions, revisited in sections of numerous chapters, and supported in *Straight Lick*'s appendix that traces the etymology of the term in selected social-science and African-American studies literature), which charts an intricate but fresh approach to evaluating what would seem to be Micheaux's central concern: the *race* question. One of Green's most provocative claims is that "class mobility is demonstrably the most pervasive theme in his films and . . . the underlying reason for Micheaux's (implicit and explicit) attacks on racism" (*Crooked Stick,* 6). What is more, Green quantifies the casting of Micheaux's (extant) films to show that racial identity does not determine virtue or vice, and that Micheaux does not take race to be the central factor shaping character. Micheaux features good and bad white characters, light-skinned black characters, and dark-skinned black characters, across the class scale (*Straight Lick,* 61; *Crooked Stick,* 10). Green repeatedly notes the "slipperiness" of the term class in general (its economic and cultural determinants), and of Micheaux's deployment of class markers for particular characters (e.g., middle-class "candor" and "racial and ethnic loyalty," vs. lower-class "furtiveness" and "racial and ethnic betrayal," vs. upper-class "foolishness" and "white supremacism" [*Straight Lick,* 31-32]). Though he returns to firm taxonomies of class coding like these to validate the soundness of Micheaux's

ideologies and aesthetics and to show that there is a system at work, Green frequently has to acknowledge that these brackets cannot hold.

In many ways, Green's books mirror the bold contradictions of Micheaux's philosophies and films, as well as Micheaux's efforts to manage them through classification. Green is less effective when he praises Micheaux for forging a moderate, middle-class "middle path" between race- and class-based political and aesthetic extremes than he is when he discusses moments in the films in which Micheaux both critiques and participates in the dangerous politics of racial representation.

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Wong Kar-Wai

By Peter Brunette. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. $35.00 cloth; $16.95 paper. 175 pages.

Peter Brunette's excellent monograph on the Hong Kong director whom many regard as among the world's most accomplished film artists reflects a current publishing trend towards shorter books on concentrated topics designed primarily for the academic market. The sixth entry in Illinois's new series, "Contemporary Film Directors" (the others include Edward Yang, Claire Denis, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Abbas Kiarostami, and the Coen brothers), *Wong Kar-Wai* attests to the enduring appeal of auteur criticism, properly applied. Brunette gives adequate recognition to Wong's two primary collaborators, cinematographer Christopher Doyle and set designer William Chang, as well as to his repertory company of actors, including the late Leslie Cheung, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, and Maggie Cheung, but at the same time remains insistent about the primacy of the director's artistic vision. He points to the embryonic quality of Wong's first feature, *As Tears Go By* (1988), made without Doyle and Chang, describes his idiosyncratic methods of writing (the screenplay is usually composed on the fly, to the chagrin of actors) and shooting (a maddeningly expensive ratio of 30:1, which means that "for Wong, the editing is all"), and cites Doyle's detailed testimony to the director's controlling presence. Brunette then defines recurrent themes and signature stylistic devices in Wong Kar-Wai's seven features—the eighth, *2046,* is treated briefly in an epilogue—that suggest the director's place in the tradition of the European art cinema.

Brunette acknowledges at the outset that he is no admirer of the popular Hong Kong action film. Unlike Wong's American patron, Quentin Tarantino, he prefers "'art' films to formula films," and is therefore drawn to Wong's "graphic expressivity"—a phrase (along with its variants) he employs perhaps too frequently throughout the book. In accordance with this bias, the methodology here is primarily formalist. Brunette pays particular attention to the role of music in supporting seemingly "empty" visuals (like the long take of cigarette smoke in *In the Mood for Love*). He defines Wong's "aesthetic signature: the stretch printing of action scenes accompanied by heavily inflected music on the soundtrack and even more strongly accented sound effects" (pervasive in *Chungking Express*). And, in a particularly satisfying strategy within such a limited survey, he provides close analysis of specific textual moments that are effectively illustrated by well chosen stills (unfortunately, not in color).

Brunette's previous scholarship—he is the author of accomplished books on Rossellini and Antonioni—and relative unfamiliarity with Hong Kong cinema show up in a predilection for comparisons with European predecessors that can sometimes seem arbitrary, as when he writes that "Wong's films are similar to Antonioni's in their mix of aesthetics and politics"—a description that surely can be applied to many directors and seems ungrounded in the absence of any richly developed Asian context for assessing the director's achievement. In keeping with the series format, however, the Western sensibility that informs this study probably makes the book more accessible to its likely readers. Moreover, the Eurocentric perspective may be appropriate for a filmmaker who so far has proven to be more commercially successful abroad than in Asia.

Also consistent with the template for the series, Brunette diligently cites many interviews with the director and reports on the critical controversies surrounding his work without staking out a strong critical position of his own. Thus, he traces the debate over Wong's treatment of genre in *As Tears Go By*: is it a generic gangster film, as David Bordwell argues, or, as Chuck Stephens and J. Carbon suggest, an art film that experiments with genre? The answer, unsurprisingly, is a critical compromise: "It makes sense to see Wong as still thoroughly involved in generic filmmaking . . . yet clearly at the same time embarked on a counter-trajectory that will come to fruition in succeeding films." Similarly, Brunette resists political readings of films like *Happy Together* as allegories of Hong Kong–Mainland relations in the face of the impending Chinese takeover, while still acknowledging their plausibility. "In their totalizing effect," Brunette suggests, such interpretations "seem to disallow the possibility that these films are about love and personal happiness as well." In such moments, the book captures a significant element of Wong's art while the same time revealing the writer's humanist sensibility. This observation is not meant as criticism. In the author's response to the generic restrictions imposed by the publisher's format, he seems to have struck an appropriate balance.

Brunette regards the crucial development in Wong's oeuvre to be the gradual subordination of style in the service of character, theme, and emotion. Thus, *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love* represent "the zenith of his cinematic art" to date in that they inscribe "a new and welcome intensification of our emotional relationship" with the protagonists. In moments like this, the book's tone briefly lapses into the bald assertions and generalizations associated with movie

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Green's unabashed admiration for Micheaux's outspokenness and productivity (seven novels; around 40 films) in the face of overwhelming restrictions is reflected in the black folk expression he adapts for the books' titles: striking "a straight lick with a crooked stick." Micheaux had to wield a "crooked stick," or use unorthodox, improvisational strategies, because he was an undercapitalized independent filmmaker and a black man bound by racist restrictions on his resources and opportunities for public commentary. But while Micheaux had to develop oblique business and representational strategies (to raise capital outside of the Hollywood studio system; to get his "controversial" racial themes past local—predominantly white—censor boards), he still managed to deliver a "straight lick," or unwavering critique of the individuals and institutions he saw as blocking African-American progress.

The phrase is an apt one, foregrounding the multiple layers of signification in Micheaux's work. He spoke his sense of truth to power, subverting the authority of white gatekeepers as well as black elites and cultural critics in his efforts to reach a mass black audience. Micheaux also criticized large portions of that audience, castigating urban decadence, Southern ignorance, "fast" entertainment culture, and duplicitous black ministers (while still trying to solicit their patronage). The term "straight lick with a crooked stick" nicely frames Green's attempt to elevate Micheaux above the superficial criticisms he has faced from the 1910s to the present day by giving his work the properly calibrated close readings they deserve. But Green's effort to cement Micheaux's "incorrigible and undaunted" oppositional status (*Crooked Stick,* 38) tends to generate rather rigid binary formulations, imposing structures of evaluation onto Micheaux's works that are at once too orderly to account for Micheaux's relentless ambiguities and too loose to make a firm case about how Micheaux wanted his films to look, to sound, and to be interpreted.

For example, the first chapter of *Straight Lick* consists of an extended discussion of "Micheaux vs. Griffith" as diametrically opposed auteurs. Pitting them against each other, Green seeks to bring Micheaux into meaningful critical comparison with the much-celebrated "father" of film narrative and American cinema. What Green is also doing is challenging persistent criticisms of Micheaux's "bourgeois" sensibilities (for instance, his seeming celebration of professional success, property ownership, vaulted speech) by framing Griffith as "elite," and thereby opening up an reverse role for Micheaux: that of a "middle-class" artist. Green explains that the term "bourgeois" should not be applied to Micheaux because it derives from elitist class aspirations and sensibilities that were not viable for or attractive to a black man of his humble origins and means. Instead, the more generic (if vague) term "middle class" better captures Micheaux's outlook and his aesthetic. According to Green, Griffith helped to establish "classical" film style by adopting "upper-class cinematic values, such as expensiveness, that were incongruous and inappropriate to the lower- and middle-class audience he aimed at and reached" (*Straight Lick,* xv). Micheaux's filmmaking, in contrast, has more "integrity" (*Straight Lick,* xv) because his class position was always materially and ideologically analogous to that of his struggling black audiences, resulting in more realistic content (the efforts of everyday people) and a style that, if "rough" in Griffithian (and, by extension, Hollywood) terms, mirrored this common (man) terrain.

Green's comparison expands the claims other scholars have made about how Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920) "answers" Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by moving beyond the politics of representation to the politics shaping production. But the laundry list Green enumerates to spell out their differences (e.g., "spectacle" vs. "documentation"; "aggrandizement" vs. "uplift"; "purity" vs. "hybridity"; "oneness" vs. "twoness" [5]) not only conflates stylistic qualities with political views, but also precludes any overlap between Micheaux's and Griffith's practices (for example, what shared qualities might make them both attract black audiences: Griffith's pre- and post-*Birth* films played in black neighborhood theaters).

Nor does the list imagine potential instabilities within the terms it uses. For example, Green describes "Hollywood professionalism" as defined by "larger-than-life spectacle," eliding generic and production budget differences that might not make a Hollywood-produced serial or B-Western as "grand" and "glossy" as a big-budget epic or musical. As a result, Green frequently frames Micheaux's "oppositional" filmmaking as correspondingly consistent, despite the fact that his close readings repeatedly demonstrate that Micheaux had multiple, and conflicting, responses to the dominant cinema, and even "aimed at the higher financing that uplift required" (*Straight Lick,* 96). Green's textual analyses maintain that Micheaux never simply imitated dominant white commercial filmmaking. A more nuanced presentation of the dominant film industry would have strengthened Green's descriptions of how Micheaux sought to "answer" and subvert Griffith's films (and then Hollywood's), to signify on them, and to compete financially with their many forms, styles, and appeals.

Green does not provide specifics about the production contexts and budgets of Micheaux and his competitors, nor does he look at Micheaux's popular and critical reception, as Bowser and Spence do so effectively in *Writing Himself into History*. Instead, he addresses some of these issues in footnotes and appendices because, as he establishes at the outset of *Straight Lick,* his investigation is a "thematic, textual, and contextual analysis and critical assessment of [Micheaux's] accomplishment in the art of cinema" (xi). Some of the most successful chapters interrogate the complex roles of "stereotype" and "caricature" in Micheaux's stylistic approaches to black subjects. In *Straight Lick,* Green considers the many ways in which Micheaux juxtaposes figures representing "uplift" with those representing the amusing "show" of black degradation by carefully considering his logics of parallel editing (in *The Exile,* 1931) and figure blocking (in *The Darktown Revue,* 1931). Green also effectively describes how Micheaux performed an extended, multitextual critique of black performativity, drawing analogies between buffoonish professional entertainers and average black folks who engage in everyday confirmations of white stereotypes (as seen in *Murder in Harlem/Lem Hawkins' Confession,* 1935).

Here and elsewhere, Green takes the bull by the horns to demonstrate that Micheaux was self-conscious not only about black stereotypes, but also about skin-color politics, white financing, the efficacy of capitalism, and the idea of a black middle class. His reading of Micheaux's passing drama, *God's Stepchildren,* in *Crooked Stick,* tackles one of Micheaux's most artistically and politically "difficult" texts: "Its acting is stilted and declamatory; its shooting is laced with technical and narrative mistakes; and it contains some of the nastiest 'racial' slurs and some of the meanest streaks in main characters in all of Micheaux's work. For viewers inclined to dislike Micheaux's style, disagree with his ideology, or distrust his loyalty and character, this film might cinch the case" (205). Though the chapter proceeds in the rather stiff template the author uses for all fifteen films discussed in the book (plot summary, then discussions of class positioning, "uplift," class comparison, and the interplay of race and class), Green offers a patient stylistic analysis, revealing how Micheaux uses dialogue and casting, as well as a dynamic interplay of looking relations involving the passing "bad girl" Naomi (presented in two-shots, close-ups, and eyeline matches [208–12]), to critique the threat and appeals of whiteness.

Although Green admirably takes his time with the thorniest of critical questions, many of his readings feel belabored precisely because he puts so much faith in—and pressure on—the films to explain themselves. Throughout both books, Green comes across as a zealous defense attorney, anticipating and deflecting any and all charges against his client with readings that confirm Micheaux's righteousness. In *Straight Lick,* he engages in a lengthy, point-for-point refutation of Thomas Cripps' dismissal of Micheaux's cinematic style in the seminal *Slow Fade to Black,* and spends a chapter countering Joseph Young's castigation of Micheaux's putative racial self-hatred in *Black Novelist as White Racist.* Too often, Green's observations about Micheaux's intentions are caught up in a chicken-and-egg argument that gleans his values and aims from close readings of the films, and in turn validates the films because they are "true" to those values and aims.

Since Green's close readings are often not evidence enough to explicate the network of relationships (with actors, financiers, audiences, critics, censors) that informed Micheaux's intended style and meanings, these books might best be read as explorations of the frameworks Micheaux created for himself to make sense of the racist personal, professional, and representational restrictions he and the black community faced. We can see this in the biographical chapter in *Crooked Stick,* which features a fantastic and long-overdue discussion of Micheaux's novels *The Case of Mrs. Wingate* (1945) and *The Story of Dorothy Stanfield* (1946), written toward the end of his career. Here Micheaux uses autobiographical surrogates to reflect on some of his artistic and business struggles and philosophies. For example, Green cites a passage in *Wingate* in which noble black filmmaker Sidney Wyeth explains that he does not mislead his actresses into believing race-film roles will lead to Hollywood stardom because his films are modest, intra-racial productions, and because Wyeth would not make such a claim to exploit black women economically or sexually. This passage offers a helpful ethical explanation of the economic and political claims Green makes in the first book about Micheaux's principled "resistance to the star system" as a Hollywood construct that the race film industry "could not afford" (*Crooked Stick,* 32–33; *Straight Lick*,118–19). Green's method of using Micheaux to explain himself may not reliably evince Micheaux's artistic intentions or prove his success, but it does offer fascinating glimpses into Micheaux's evaluation of himself (particularly over time), and the structures he tried to put in place to chart his own merits and progress.

Green's most innovative contribution is his tailored discussion of class (explicated in both introductions, revisited in sections of numerous chapters, and supported in *Straight Lick*'s appendix that traces the etymology of the term in selected social-science and African-American studies literature), which charts an intricate but fresh approach to evaluating what would seem to be Micheaux's central concern: the *race* question. One of Green's most provocative claims is that "class mobility is demonstrably the most pervasive theme in his films and . . . the underlying reason for Micheaux's (implicit and explicit) attacks on racism" (*Crooked Stick,* 6). What is more, Green quantifies the casting of Micheaux's (extant) films to show that racial identity does not determine virtue or vice, and that Micheaux does not take race to be the central factor shaping character. Micheaux features good and bad white characters, light-skinned black characters, and dark-skinned black characters, across the class scale (*Straight Lick,* 61; *Crooked Stick,* 10). Green repeatedly notes the "slipperiness" of the term class in general (its economic and cultural determinants), and of Micheaux's deployment of class markers for particular characters (e.g., middle-class "candor" and "racial and ethnic loyalty," vs. lower-class "furtiveness" and "racial and ethnic betrayal," vs. upper-class "foolishness" and "white supremacism" [*Straight Lick,* 31-32]). Though he returns to firm taxonomies of class coding like these to validate the soundness of Micheaux's

ideologies and aesthetics and to show that there is a system at work, Green frequently has to acknowledge that these brackets cannot hold.

In many ways, Green's books mirror the bold contradictions of Micheaux's philosophies and films, as well as Micheaux's efforts to manage them through classification. Green is less effective when he praises Micheaux for forging a moderate, middle-class "middle path" between race- and class-based political and aesthetic extremes than he is when he discusses moments in the films in which Micheaux both critiques and participates in the dangerous politics of racial representation.

JACQUELINE STEWART is Associate Professor of English, Cinema & Media Studies, and African & African American Studies at the University of Chicago, and author of *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005).

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Wong Kar-Wai

By Peter Brunette. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. $35.00 cloth; $16.95 paper. 175 pages.

Peter Brunette's excellent monograph on the Hong Kong director whom many regard as among the world's most accomplished film artists reflects a current publishing trend towards shorter books on concentrated topics designed primarily for the academic market. The sixth entry in Illinois's new series, "Contemporary Film Directors" (the others include Edward Yang, Claire Denis, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Abbas Kiarostami, and the Coen brothers), *Wong Kar-Wai* attests to the enduring appeal of auteur criticism, properly applied. Brunette gives adequate recognition to Wong's two primary collaborators, cinematographer Christopher Doyle and set designer William Chang, as well as to his repertory company of actors, including the late Leslie Cheung, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, and Maggie Cheung, but at the same time remains insistent about the primacy of the director's artistic vision. He points to the embryonic quality of Wong's first feature, *As Tears Go By* (1988), made without Doyle and Chang, describes his idiosyncratic methods of writing (the screenplay is usually composed on the fly, to the chagrin of actors) and shooting (a maddeningly expensive ratio of 30:1, which means that "for Wong, the editing is all"), and cites Doyle's detailed testimony to the director's controlling presence. Brunette then defines recurrent themes and signature stylistic devices in Wong Kar-Wai's seven features—the eighth, *2046,* is treated briefly in an epilogue—that suggest the director's place in the tradition of the European art cinema.

Brunette acknowledges at the outset that he is no admirer of the popular Hong Kong action film. Unlike Wong's American patron, Quentin Tarantino, he prefers "'art' films to formula films," and is therefore drawn to Wong's "graphic expressivity"—a phrase (along with its variants) he employs perhaps too frequently throughout the book. In accordance with this bias, the methodology here is primarily formalist. Brunette pays particular attention to the role of music in supporting seemingly "empty" visuals (like the long take of cigarette smoke in *In the Mood for Love*). He defines Wong's "aesthetic signature: the stretch printing of action scenes accompanied by heavily inflected music on the soundtrack and even more strongly accented sound effects" (pervasive in *Chungking Express*). And, in a particularly satisfying strategy within such a limited survey, he provides close analysis of specific textual moments that are effectively illustrated by well chosen stills (unfortunately, not in color).

Brunette's previous scholarship—he is the author of accomplished books on Rossellini and Antonioni—and relative unfamiliarity with Hong Kong cinema show up in a predilection for comparisons with European predecessors that can sometimes seem arbitrary, as when he writes that "Wong's films are similar to Antonioni's in their mix of aesthetics and politics"—a description that surely can be applied to many directors and seems ungrounded in the absence of any richly developed Asian context for assessing the director's achievement. In keeping with the series format, however, the Western sensibility that informs this study probably makes the book more accessible to its likely readers. Moreover, the Eurocentric perspective may be appropriate for a filmmaker who so far has proven to be more commercially successful abroad than in Asia.

Also consistent with the template for the series, Brunette diligently cites many interviews with the director and reports on the critical controversies surrounding his work without staking out a strong critical position of his own. Thus, he traces the debate over Wong's treatment of genre in *As Tears Go By*: is it a generic gangster film, as David Bordwell argues, or, as Chuck Stephens and J. Carbon suggest, an art film that experiments with genre? The answer, unsurprisingly, is a critical compromise: "It makes sense to see Wong as still thoroughly involved in generic filmmaking . . . yet clearly at the same time embarked on a counter-trajectory that will come to fruition in succeeding films." Similarly, Brunette resists political readings of films like *Happy Together* as allegories of Hong Kong–Mainland relations in the face of the impending Chinese takeover, while still acknowledging their plausibility. "In their totalizing effect," Brunette suggests, such interpretations "seem to disallow the possibility that these films are about love and personal happiness as well." In such moments, the book captures a significant element of Wong's art while the same time revealing the writer's humanist sensibility. This observation is not meant as criticism. In the author's response to the generic restrictions imposed by the publisher's format, he seems to have struck an appropriate balance.

Brunette regards the crucial development in Wong's oeuvre to be the gradual subordination of style in the service of character, theme, and emotion. Thus, *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love* represent "the zenith of his cinematic art" to date in that they inscribe "a new and welcome intensification of our emotional relationship" with the protagonists. In moments like this, the book's tone briefly lapses into the bald assertions and generalizations associated with movie

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reviews, but the claim that "a more mature Wong has come to realize . . . that the controlling aesthetic of his earlier work —ebullient style sometimes indulged for its own sake—has its limitations" still rings true. In this respect, Wong's artistic trajectory parallels that of Pedro Almodóvar, although the Spanish director is never invoked for comparison.

Brunette identifies Wong's recurrent theme to be "the eternal impossibility of love." In combination with obsessions about time, memory, and loss, this motif reaches an artistic apotheosis with *In the Mood for Love,* which is described (rather too breathlessly) as "one of the most powerful renditions of mutually unrequited love in cinema history." Readers may resist such rhetorical flourishes and nominate other candidates for this place of honor in the cinematic pantheon, but few will dispute this particular film's hypnotic appeal or dismiss Brunette's fine understanding of Wong's romantic melancholy: "So much motion, so little progress."

The series format provides the standard scholarly features. Although the bibliography is certainly adequate for an introductory survey, Brunette does overlook two monographs in the Hong Kong University Press series on Hong Kong cinema—Wimal Dissanayake's on *Ashes of Time* and Jeremy Tambling's on *Happy Together*—that provide additional cultural context for assessing the director's achievement. I especially appreciated the author's judicious use of footnotes (37 in all), which were both consistently relevant and informative. Each entry in the Illinois series includes an interview with the featured director, and Brunette includes two. The first, conducted by the author himself following a first viewing of *Fallen Angels* at the Toronto Film Festival in 1995, should have remained unpublished, as it is naïve ("There's just so much going on in your films I don't even know what kind of questions to ask you") and unrevealing. The second, conducted by Gilles Ciment at Cannes in 2001, is valuable, although it is transcribed from the supplemental material on the Criterion DVD release of *In the Mood for Love*.

Wong Kar-Wai remains, in its author's words, an "interim report" on a significant auteur in mid-career rather than a definitive critical biography or exhaustive cinematic analysis. As such, it is a successful, highly readable starting point for students and scholars who want to learn more about Wong's existing work and to chart his future progress.

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